THE HYPOCRITE.

A NOVEL.

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THE HYPOCRITE;

OR,

THE MODERN JANUS.

A Novel.

IN FIVE VOLUMES.

BY

SELINA DAVENPORT.

So spake the false dissembler, unperceiv'd.
For neither man nor angel can discern
Hypocrisy, the only evil that walks
Invisible, except to God alone,
By his permissive will, through heaven and earth:
And oft, though wisdom wake, suspicion sleeps
At wisdom's gate, and to simplicity
Resigns her charge, while goodness thinks no ill
Where no ill seems.

MILTON.

VOL. I.

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THE

HYPOCRITE.

CHAP. I.

IT was the latter end of December; the day dark, humid, and oppressively gloomy; yet Dudley, the lover and the poet, felt not its chilling influence. Seated in his study-chair, by the side of a blazing fire, the sombre appearance of the atmosphere was unnoticed; visions of bliss, of love, of hope, occupied his mind. He had just finished the last line of a sonnet, which, for the beauty of its thoughts, the elegance of its diction, and the rich harmony of its numbers, might have vied with Spenser, Milton, or the immortal

Petrarch; it expressed all the delicate tenderness, the refined passion, which he felt, and which few could so happily describe as himself.

A loud knocking at the door of his lodging put to flight Cupid and his attendants. Dudley hastily concealed the effusion of his muse: it was not written to meet the eye of vulgar curiosity or every-day friendship. One object alone was destined to peruse what would have given pleasure to every mind possessed of taste and feeling.

He rose with eagerness, as Courteney, the man of his heart, the friend of his bosom, entered the chamber; and pressing his extended hand, warmly testified his joy at beholding him so soon.

"I received your letter this morning," replied his friend, "and hastened to welcome your return to London."

"Thank you, my dear Leopold, for this additional proof of your regard. How are Sybella and the boys?"

"Quite

"Quite well; Sybella requested me to deliver her love and best wishes. I need not ask concerning your health, or the state of your affairs; your countenance, Edmund, betrays that all is well within. Would that I could say the same!"

"My dear Leopold," said Dudley, again pressing his hand, "all will soon, I trust, be well. Though your talents and abilities are, at present, a little obscured by misfortunes, yet fear not, my friend; the cloud which has lately hung over your prospects will quickly disperse, and all will be sunshine and prosperity. You must stay and partake of bachelor's fare;" the blood crimsoned his cheek. "At eight o'clock I must leave you; until then, my dear Leopold, let us enjoy 'the feast of reason and the flow of soul."

To this his friend assented, and they drew their chairs still closer to the cheering fire.

"You have been absent, Edmund,

three months; and if I may judge by your letters, they have been the happiest of your life. You have made me venerate lord Mortimer, esteem the marchioness of Wilmington, and fall desperately in love with the beautiful Althea. But tell me, Dudley, how is it that your features wear the air of one who has every thing to hope from a successful passion? I had expected to find, from the hopelessness of your attachment, all the outward and visible signs of a disappointed lover."

Dudley smiled expressively—"My better genius has destined it otherwise," said he; "and you, my friend, who, I make no doubt, hastened to afford me all the consolation in your power, supposing me to be the most unhappy of human beings, must be agreeably surprised at discovering me the very reverse of what you had expected. The truth is, my dear Leopold, that dame Fortune, who has persecuted me for two-and-twenty years, is at last tired or ashamed of annoying

me any longer, and has bestowed a recompence for past miseries far beyond my hopes or deserts."

Courteney looked anxiously at his friend; a sickly tremor came over him. Dudley continued—"When I accompanied my more than father, the ever-to-be-revered sir Thomas Percy, to pay a visit to the widowed sister of lord Mortimer, I was, as you well know, labouring under a severe bodily derangement, and an almost insupportable oppression of spirits. At the Wilderness we found the marchioness and her infant family, her brother, lord Mortimer, and his daughter, the lovely, the divine Althea. Sir Thomas, with his usual partiality, had paved the way for my reception. It was flattering in the extreme—it was all that my high spirit and proud heart could require. In the youthful daughter of the earl, who is countess of Brandon in her own right, I quickly discovered an object whose person, mind, manners, and taste,

called forth my unqualified admiration, and secured my fondest love. This enchanting girl, bred up in the solitude of her father's castle, educated under his watchful eye, and reared amidst a train of domestics, who looked up to her as to a creature of angelic birth, and who idolized even the turf she hallowed by her steps, was now, for the first time, beyond the precincts of her father's domain, preparatory to her introduction this winter into the fashionable world. I was the constant companion of her walks; my opinion was consulted in every thing she read, in every thing she did; my verses she set to music, and sang them with the most exquisite pathos and feeling; while whatever merit they possessed was heightened by the beauty of her compositions, and the touching sweetness of her voice and eyes. I was soon convinced that the heart of this lovely woman was my own. She knew the confined state of my circumstances, the independence of my principles;

principles; and sought not to conceal her regard whenever opportunity brought us alone. The time approached for our return to town—my spirits again sunk—I became a prey to all the horrors of a hopeless attachment, for hopeless it then appeared. Althea sought to draw from me the state of my heart, the cause of my dejection. My pride for a while refused to disclose what her rank and fortune alone made it necessary to conceal. She surprised me, however, into a confession of my love."

Here the entrance of the servant, who announced that dinner was on table, interrupted their conversation. Courteney ate little, and said less; his future happiness seemed to hang upon the conclusion of his friend's narrative. With an eagerness which *appeared* the offspring of sincere friendship, he requested Dudley to continue, as soon as their repast was concluded.

"First," exclaimed his friend, as he

 filled

filled the glass, "let us drink the health of my beloved Althea."

Courteney was a lover of the bottle, yet the wine had lost its relish, as he drank to the health of the youthful countess.

"Before our departure from the Wilderness," resumed Dudley, "a miniature painter of considerable eminence came to take the likenesses of lady Wilmington's children. 'I shall be contented,' said the earl to Mr. C——ry, 'if you are as successful with my nephews as you were with the countess. Independent of its being a striking resemblance, the picture is a very fine one, and has gained you considerable praise in the sister kingdom. The duchess of Fitz-Aubin assured me that all her friends in Ireland highly applauded your performance.' This was the first time that I had heard of Mr. C——ry's visit to Mortimer Castle. It gave birth to a train of maddening reflections, which I strove to quell in the solitude of the Wilderness garden,

garden, but strove in vain. Imagination pictured the transports of the duke on receiving from his mother a gift so precious as that which the earl had sent him. To see such beauties daily, to be licensed to adore them, would soon be the blissful fate of Althea's noble relative; their union would quickly follow, and I, oh misery! might even be expected to compose an epithalamium on the occasion."

"That would have been mortifying indeed!" said Courteney.

"My brain was on fire—my heart felt bursting with agony. I heard a step approach the seat on which I had thrown myself—it was Althea; her voice arrested my flight. Alarmed at my appearance, she in a tone so soft, so tender, and so soothing, inquired how long I had been unwell? Unable to reply, I could only raise my tearful eyes to hers, and press her hand to my beating heart. Again, in accents still more gentle and affectionate, she conjured me, by the friendship

I had honoured her with, to inform her of the cause of my distress. Had I received any unfavourable news from London? were any of my friends ill? 'Believe me, Mr. Dudley,' said she, 'that it is not womanly curiosity which prompts my inquiry; it is a wish, a desire, to sooth, to alleviate, if possible, what has thus severely discomposed you.'

'You are all goodness, all benevolence,' I replied; 'but, alas! my cruel destiny, my humble situation in life, forbids me to taste the sweets of your heavenly sympathy. Your ladyship, although possessing the power of dispensing happiness the most exquisite, cannot still the emotions of this too-daring soul, or quell the racking torture which agonizes my brain to frenzy. Doomed from my cradle to be the sport of fortune—to see, by degrees, every cherished hope, every fond expectation, blasted—to witness the total wreck of every promised joy—what then remains for

for such a wretch as Dudley, but to end at once his life and woes!'

"The colour receded from the blooming face of Althea, and she sunk lifeless on my bosom. Scarce knowing what I did, I pressed her to my heart. The violence of my agitation revived her; opening her dovelike eyes, she fixed them reproachfully on mine, and in a low voice said—'Cruel friend! to see so light a value on those, who, if they have not the power to serve you, have at least all the inclination and desires of true friendship. You have deceived me, Mr. Dudley; you taught me to believe that my esteem, and that of my family, were dear to you—that our society had charms which could allure you from the world and all its pleasures. You have deceived me—but—I forgive you.'

"She was retreating from me, when I flung myself at her feet. I conjured her to hear my vindication, although it

would then be requisite that I should quit her for ever. Pale and trembling, she suffered me to lead her to the seat, and with the countenance of an angel, listened to the presumptuous avowal of my passion, which nothing but the dread of her displeasure at my seeming ingratitude for all the kindness I had received could have wrung from me."

"It was rather a hazardous disclosure, I think," said Courteney, with gravity.

"It was so," replied Dudley; "yet, nevertheless, she raised me from the ground with a look of enchanting sweetness, while the blood crimsoned her neck and face, as she said—'Do you indeed, Mr. Dudley, expect that I should banish you for ever from my presence, or view with haughty indignation and wounded pride a man whom I have ever esteemed most highly, and who has discovered in me virtues which, perhaps, no one else has found out? Ah! now I feel the want of that knowledge of the world, which

would

would teach me how to act in this trying hour. My own heart prompts me to return your sincerity with equal candour; but a something whispers, that the delicacy of my sex forbids it. Live, live, I conjure you! and believe that Althea, however restrained from giving vent to her natural feelings, can never despise or think with indifference on the friend of her heart's free election.'

'Angel of purity!' I cried, pressing her soft hand to my parched lips; 'such goodness, such condescension is more than I deserve. Yes, I will live—live to put up prayers for thy happiness! Yet how blank will all nature seem when I am excluded from thy presence—when I am denied the proud felicity of thy conversation!'

'And why, and who has rendered this banishment necessary?' said she.

'Oh, most adored!' I cried, 'all my fortitude would be insufficient to bear the sight of your cousin's bliss. I will

endeavour

endeavour to check my heart's wild throbbings, to remember the insuperable bar which divides us; but I cannot be a witness to the rapture of the duke of Fitz-Aubin.'

'I comprehend you,' said she, blushing: 'you heard this morning that my picture had been sent to his mother. My father, I believe, has some idea of what you allude to. At one time such a proposal would have been indifferent to me, but now—now, Mr. Dudley, I should certainly reject it. Oh! do not fear that my introduction into the world will ever make me otherwise than what I now am—will ever make me forget one whose exalted mind could discover qualities in a young, ignorant, country girl, worthy his approbation.'

"To be short, my dear Leopold, this innocent confession of the countess again drew from me protestations of eternal affection; and the lovely, timid, artless girl, at length owned that Dudley, the humble

humble poet, the orphan, and the unfortunate, was dearer to her than existence. Doting on her to distraction, and feeling that it was impossible for me to live without her, I yet possessed sufficient honour to point out to her the consequences which might arise from her union with one so much her inferior in rank and fortune."

"Her union!" hastily exclaimed Courteney; "surely the countess was not mad enough to think of such a thing?"

Dudley cast a look on his friend, which immediately brought him to his recollection.

"Forgive me, dearest Edmund; my regard for you makes me foresee a hundred difficulties and dangers from this unfortunate connexion."

The countenance of Dudley recovered its former serenity, and he continued—"Our walks were now prolonged as much as possible. Love was the theme upon which each dwelt with rapture; yet I could

could not conceal my dread of the future, my fears lest the earl should succeed in bringing about the marriage of the duke with my beloved Althea. Still, in the midst of my distress, I owned myself unworthy of the sacrifice which she seemed willing to make.

'After having acknowledged my affection,' said the countess, 'all your arguments, my dear Dudley, will be used in vain. You possess my heart, and no other shall ever claim a right to my hand. In *you* are centered all the qualifications of mind and soul with which I used to deck the vision of my fancy. With *you* I could be happy, divested of my birthright, and all its splendour—*without you* I must be miserable. Seek not, therefore, to weaken my fixed resolves. If, indeed, Althea is the chosen of your heart, joyfully will she risk every thing to become the wife of him who first taught her the sweets of a refined and tender passion.'

"Vain was my determination of abiding

ing by the rule of conduct which honour and generosity had marked out for me. Even Althea began to hint her fears, lest some unforeseen circumstance should arise to prevent our union. Fondly pressing her to my bosom, I kissed off the falling tear. 'Ah, my Edmund!' she exclaimed, in a tone of witching softness, 'how shall I be assured that when we leave the Wilderness, you will have the opportunity to sooth and console me by your conversation, and encourage me by your presence, to wear an air of ease and cheerfulness which will *then* be foreign to my heart? If I was indeed your wife, that delightful certainty would enable me to bear with tolerable serenity our sometimes necessary separation.'

"To combat against her matchless tenderness, and the strength of my own passion, was more than I could perform. I yielded not to reason, Leopold, not to the allurements of wealth and power, but to my attachment to herself; and

only

only lamented that the inferiority of birth was not on her side, that I might prove the *disinterestedness* of my love. To oblige Althea, I sat to Mr. C——ry, and was rewarded, on presenting her with my picture, by receiving a charming likeness of herself."

Dudley opened his bosom, and drew from it a miniature—"Here, Leopold, view these features, and be still more convinced of the madness of the countess. It was herself who placed it round my neck, and I promised that no hand but her own should unclasp the chain."

Courteney leaned forward, and as he contemplated the glowing beauties of Althea, his envy increased, his discontent strengthened. Yet was he lavish of his praise, for who could withhold it from such an object?

Dudley pressed the miniature to his lips; then consigned it to the faithful bosom which beat only for the original.

"Such a woman," exclaimed Courteney,

ney, aiming at gaiety as he spoke, "might well justify my friend for yielding to what the world will call a mercenary passion."

"The world I despise," retorted Dudley. "Conscious of my own integrity, and the justness of my cause, I defy its malevolence. To secure the peace and happiness of Althea, I willingly brave its censure. *She* is convinced that no selfish motive induced me to hazard her father's displeasure; and to no other human being will I condescend to excuse my conduct. I am, I confess, rather surprised that *you*, Leopold, seem rather to *regret* than *rejoice* at your friend's good fortune, in possessing the affections of such a woman as the countess of Brandon."

"It is her being countess of Brandon that makes me tremble for my friend," replied Courteney, with well-dissembled sincerity; "I am conscious of your talents, your undoubted right to the notice you have received; but, my dear Edmund,

Edmund, what hopes have you that the earl will ever be brought to consent to your union, or that sir Thomas Percy will overlook what may justly be termed a breach of hospitality?"

"Sir Thomas," warmly replied the poet, "has a mind and soul not to be affected by the pageantry of a high-sounding name, or a long list of titled ancestors. His praise, his affection, his parental care, have taught me to appreciate the value of those abilities of which I feel that I am possessed. It is the consciousness of superior genius, of talent which NOBILITY cannot purchase, of an uncorrupted heart, a free and independent mind, a soul and spirit that would not stoop to solicit a favour, or pay homage to the mere *title* of any man, that has gained me the love of Althea. Could wealth have any charms for me, it would be in the pleasing conviction that it would enable me to dispense comforts to those less fortunate than myself. To render

render happy my dear Leopold and his amiable Sybella will be my first care."

Courteney, as he returned the pressure of Dudley's hand, felt a momentary return of his former affection, which the superior good fortune of his friend had greatly diminished.

"My dear Edmund," said he, replenishing his glass, "cannot doubt the sincerity of my regard; and if I have been backward in expressions of congratulation, it arose solely from a fear of his receiving more pain than pleasure, more evil than good, from the connexion. However, my friend, may no impediment arise to separate you and the lovely Althea, but may your loves be crowned by a speedy union, with the consent of her relations! May I inquire, Edmund, whether you think that likely to happen? have you no dread lest her father should be anxious to see on her brows the ducal coronet of Fitz-Aubin? alas, my friend!

against such a rival, even your superior merit will, I fear, avail but little."

"I have heard much of the person and fortune of the duke," replied Dudley, with a careless air; "but I am perfectly at ease respecting his capability of injuring me; my beloved Althea has put it out of *his* power, or the power of any earthly being, to divide us."

Courteney looked paler than usual—"What do you mean, Edmund? am I not worthy," and his conscience accused him as he spoke, "to be trusted?"

"Yes, my dear Leopold, you are worthy, most worthy, to possess my entire confidence; nor will I now shrink from entrusting to your prudence and friendship the secret of my soul. Know then, my friend, that before we quitted the Wilderness, Althea, anxious to convince me how firm, how faithful, was her attachment, as well as to put it beyond the power of chance or force to separate us,

became

became mine for life! You start, my dear Leopold; you look incredulous; but Althea, the adored, the beloved of my heart, is the wife of my bosom!"

Animated by his own rapturous sensations, he saw not the ghastly hue which overspread the pallid face of Courteney, who, with extreme difficulty, concealed his inward chagrin, envy, and mortification.

Dudley continued—"We were married privately, by the worthy curate of the village, whose wife and brother, together with the nurse of Althea, were alone present at the ceremony. Oh, Leopold! what terms are capable of describing my bliss, when I folded in my arms the noble girl, who, for my sake, had thus generously made so great a sacrifice—when I pressed my lips to hers, and hailed her as my wife! Excess of joy made a child of me, and I actually shed tears on the beloved bosom of my Althea."

Courteney,

Courteney, recovering in some degree his self-command, congratulated his friend, with every semblance of sincerity, on his good fortune in possessing so lovely a woman; and raising his eyes and hands devoutly to heaven, exclaimed —"Oh, Father of Mercy! grant that this union of my beloved Edmund and his Althea may be productive of every earthly happiness! and that no rash, presumptuous mortal may dare attempt to separate those whom thou, oh God of the universe! hast joined together!"

Then taking the hand of his friend, he said—"I must see your Althea; you must contrive to introduce me to her, Edmund. Already my heart acknowledges her as a sister, as the wife of my dearest friend."

"Gladly, my dear Leopold, will I acquiesce in your wishes. My Althea is prepared to esteem you, and her father and aunt will not be sorry to increase the pleasures of their leisure hours, by the

conversation

conversation of a man of talent like my friend. To-morrow you will be with me to breakfast, and we will make a morning's call on the marchioness. I am going there this evening, and will take in my pocket your volume of poems, preparatory to your introduction."

Courteney could not avoid feeling himself honoured by this unexpected offer of being personally introduced to the notice of a family equal in connexion and splendour to any in the kingdom; nor did he hesitate to thank the highly-favoured friend, through whose means so desirable an event would take place.

Dudley, with a heart alive not only to the extacies of love, but to the endearments of friendship, rose, and taking from his desk a bank-note of thirty pounds, put it into the hand of his less fortunate friend—"Accept," said he, "of this trifle, my dear Leopold, until I can command more; and tell your amiable Sybella, that if it is not inconvenient for

her to receive an old acquaintance at her table, I will dine with her to-morrow."

Courteney received the note with eager joy, and thought more of the comforts it would procure for himself, than of the noble and generous hand from whence it came. He saw his handsome friend prepare himself, with all the expedition of a lover, to attend the idol of his soul. Gratitude and ancient friendship struggled hard against selfishness and envy; but the latter predominated, and he quitted the lodgings of Dudley mortified at his superior fortune, and discontented more than ever with his own situation in life, and even with the mild and amiable companion of his misfortunes, whose steady tenderness, and patient endurance of evils which his imprudence alone was the cause of, ought to have rendered her doubly dear, doubly sacred, in the eyes of her husband.

CHAP.

CHAP. II.

Leopold Courteney was the only son of an eminent tradesman, who having received rather a confined education himself, was determined that his child should not have to labour under the same disadvantage. Accordingly Leopold was sent to a seminary of repute in the neighbourhood, where, by associating with the sons of private gentlemen, he acquired a dislike for his father's business, and, in fact, for every other. The old man, however, was obstinately bent upon his doing something for himself, yet gave him the privilege of making his own election.

Leopold, who would fain have led the same idle life as many of his schoolfellows, and who had imbibed a taste for literature, which he was anxious to give way to, chose, as the least disagreeable,

the business of a bookseller. His father therefore placed him in an old-established house in the city; and there Leopold had an opportunity of studying those authors whose works he had long and ardently wished to be acquainted with.

During his residence in P—— R—w, he became known to Edmund Dudley, who occasionally called to give orders for what books he wanted. The manners of Dudley, his well-known talents, his reputation as an author, and, above all, his affable and courteous demeanour towards the young bookseller, encouraged Leopold to put into his hands some of his own amatory pieces.

Dudley instantly discovered, amidst their stiffness and want of perspicuity, the latent marks of genius; and with a readiness which did him honour, immediately volunteered to correct those early effusions of the poet; at the same time giving him a general invitation to his lodgings. Courteney, not a little grati-

fied

fied by this kindness from one whose talents he highly respected, early availed himself of Dudley's invitation; and thus commenced a friendship, which, for a considerable time, was reciprocally affectionate.

Courteney, as soon as his time was expired with Mr. ——, determined to turn author. To this his father objected. The son, however, was equally obstinate; and a coolness between them was, of course, the result. His marriage shortly after, with an amiable and deserving woman, contrary to the wishes of the old man, so strongly incensed him against his son, that the paternal door was for ever closed against Leopold and his unoffending wife.

Dudley, with all the generosity of real friendship, soothed and comforted the new-married pair, and gave them every proof his *then* limited circumstances would allow, of the strength and durability of his regard. He encouraged

Leopold to undertake a work which would relieve his present necessities, and promised to correct any little errors it might possess.

Courtenay but ill deserved the affectionate solicitude of such a man as Edmund Dudley. Selfish and narrow-minded, sordid, unprincipled, and mean, envious of the superior genius of Dudley, and jealous of the notice and patronage he enjoyed from persons of rank and high literary fame, his heart secretly nourished feelings which none but the basest of human nature could have given birth to. Vain from his own growing reputation as a poet, he began to imagine that in a short time his writings would be classed with those of a Campbell, a Montgomery, a Moore, or even with those of Dudley.

Discontented at the accumulating embarrassments which his marriage had brought on him, he gradually began to look upon the innocent partner of his

distress

distress as the sole cause of all the disagreeables which surrounded him. Insolent in prosperity, weak and irresolute in adversity, he wanted courage to face the troubles which his own errors and extravagances had drawn on him; and Dudley was always applied to, either to soften by his eloquence the rigid heart of a creditor, or to lend him pecuniary assistance.

Ever ready, on these occasions, to obey the summons of Leopold, Dudley in general succeeded in extricating him from his temporary difficulties. His purse, such as it was, was ever at the service of his friend; nor did he once reflect that his own circumscribed finances were injured by these repeated liberalities.

The letters of Dudley during his visit at the Wilderness increased the dissatisfaction of Leopold. They informed him that his generous friend had received every flattering attention from its noble inmates; that his health was re-establish-

ed, his spirits buoyant, and his prospects bright and unclouded. In the warm praise bestowed on the lovely Althea, Leopold discovered the attachment of Dudley; but he had never allowed himself to imagine for a moment that the daughter of lord Mortimer would return the love of an orphan, of no fortune, family, or connexions, which could entitle him to such a distinction.

Curiosity was the predominant motive which impelled him to hasten to the lodgings of Dudley, as soon as he received intelligence of his arrival in town. The animated expression of his handsome countenance, the pleasure which sparkled in his beautiful eyes, excited suspicions which Courteney could but ill conceal; and it required his strongest powers of dissimulation to hide from the penetrating glances of Dudley the chagrin and envy which filled his bosom at the conviction of his friend's unexpected success, and unlooked-for exaltation.

More

More and more disgusted with his own condition in life, Courteney returned to the humble habitation which contained his wife, her sister, and his children. The discontent and vexation which clouded his countenance was noticed by Sybella; who sat rocking the cradle which contained her youngest child; while Maria was anxiously endeavouring to pacify the two eldest boys, who refused to go to bed unless their mother went with them.

Leopold's gloom increased; he contrasted the confused and uncomfortable state of his own little dwelling with the splendour and elegance of the mansion of which his friend, in all probability, would soon be master. Throwing his hat on the ground, he angrily ordered his sister to carry the crying boys to their chamber, and to hasten down in order to procure him something nice for his supper.

Maria mildly obeyed; and, well know-

ing the impatient disposition of her brother-in-law, she bribed her fretful nephews to quietness, and quickly returned, to receive their father's commands. Giving her the bank-note presented him by Dudley, he desired her to go and settle with the most pressing of their trades-people, and to purchase a fowl and some wine for their supper.

The sisters looked in amaze at each other. Courteney smiled bitterly—"We will enjoy ourselves to-night, Sybella! and you, Maria, be sure to order half-a-dozen of the best Port—the best, my girl; it must be the best, to drink the health of Edmund Dudley and his bride."

"His bride!" faintly repeated Maria, while her cheek grew pale as death.

"His bride!" re-echoed Sybella; "dear Leopold, you jest; you do not mean to say that Edmund is married?"

"Nothing is more certain," replied her husband; "and to-morrow you will have an opportunity of wishing him joy, as

as he intends to honour us with his presence to dinner. But come, Maria, hasten to execute my wishes, and you shall then be fully informed of all."

Maria was not long absent; Dudley was too great a favourite of both sisters for them to be easy until every thing was explained; and Leopold, who anticipated the comfort of a good hot supper, and a bottle of good wine, readily gave the wished-for information.

"Most sincerely do I rejoice at his happiness," exclaimed Sybella; "for he is truly deserving of it, were it ten times as much. But who, Leopold, would have supposed that a woman of such exalted birth, and so young too, should possess courage enough to brave the censure such a choice will unavoidably draw upon her?"

"And with justice," replied her husband. "The youth of the countess is her only excuse. What but her inexperience of the world, her ignorance of

men and manners, could justify her so rashly uniting herself to one who, like myself, had little to recommend him but his talents? Had any other man of genius (myself, for example) been thrown in her way, I have no doubt but that she would have become as easy a conquest."

Sybella loved her husband tenderly; she had, in marrying him, offended all her relations, and entailed on herself and sister a variety of misfortunes and deprivations, the consequent attendants of an imprudent union; yet, notwithstanding her affection, of which she had given the most convincing proof, she could not avoid smiling inwardly at this fresh instance of Leopold's vanity; with all her partiality, she still felt that he must ever lose by a comparison with Edmund Dudley, whose personal attractions alone were far superior to those of her husband.

It was not the form or features of Leopold

pold that gained the heart of his wife; the former was tall, meagre, and ungracefully stiff—the latter pale, and marked with the small-pox; on the whole, he had no one *personal* beauty to boast of, except a delicate white hand, which he took care to display upon every occasion; yet Leopold Courtenay not only contrived to ensure to himself the lasting tenderness of Sybella Rowden, but actually could brag of more victories over the female heart than many of his more handsome acquaintances. He was by nature the consummate hypocrite, the professor of feelings, principles, and morals, to which he was, in fact, an utter stranger, except by name. His conversation, neither eloquent nor persuasive, yet pleased, from the particular air of sincerity with which his words were delivered; and an uniform appearance of religious devotion, which never failed to impress his hearers with a favourable idea

idea of the goodness and piety of his heart.

Although deficient in that richness of expression, brilliancy of imagination, and exquisite tenderness, which characterized the productions of Edmund Dudley, yet those of Leopold were by no means contemptible; and to *those* he was indebted principally for his success with the fair sex. Even in his love poems he infused a religious fervour; nor were passages from Scripture wanting to render his expressions and feelings still more apparently sincere.

Many were the young and innocent victims of his dangerous wiles—many confided in the *man of God;* for such he appeared; yet *all* who trusted to the *holy one,* found, when too late, that a *religious hypocrite* is the most dangerous and the most hardened of any. Profligate and voluptuous, a libertine in mind and heart, he scrupled not to ridicule in

secret the refined and delicate taste of Dudley, or even to laugh at his nice sense of honour, which had uniformly forbade his taking advantage of a moment of female weakness. Yet did he not dare to avow openly the extent of his licentiousness, lest he should disgust the noble mind of a man now become convenient to his necessities.

In recounting to Sybella and her sister the good fortune of their favourite, they too plainly discovered the envy which filled his bosom, and which had tinged his features with a deeper sallowness. The sight of the roast fowl and egg sauce in some measure recomposed his spirits; and the wine, of which he drank pretty freely, at length put him in a better temper.

"To-morrow," cried Sybella, joyfully, "you will be introduced to the charming countess! oh, Leopold! how I should like, were it possible, to enjoy the same gratification! but we are destined to

move in a humbler sphere of life, and I must be satisfied with a view of her picture; which Edmund will, of course, bring with him."

"Where *he* is, there also will be the miniature of Althea," replied her husband. "The infatuated girl placed it herself round his neck, and I will answer for it that Dudley would deem it a sacrilege to displace it, though but for a moment. Come, Maria, my dear sister, you have not yet drank your wine. Here's to the health and happiness of Edmund and Althea."

Maria put the glass to her lips, but she could not drink the toast; her heart was full, and a tear, which would not be restrained, mixed with the wine.

"Ah, Maria!" exclaimed Leopold, half gay, half serious, "I often told you that the proud, aspiring Dudley would not condescend to mix his blood with that of a tradesman's child. But never mind, my dear girl; a happier lot may

yet

yet await you. Remember that 'all is for the best."

"I wish, my dear Leopold," said his wife, tenderly kissing his hand, "that you would sometimes remember it also; then I should not suffer so severely from beholding you uneasy and disgusted at our present mortifications. But now, Leopold, you will begin to encourage hopes of better fortune. All that rests in Dudley's power we are sure of his performing."

"True," replied her husband; "Dudley's connexion with lord Mortimer's family may enable him to be of service to us; and I think there are no fears of his forgetting in prosperity the friend and companion of his less wealthy hours."

"Never, never!" cried Sybella. "Edmund is incapable of such unkind neglect. Trust me, my dear Leopold, we may safely rely upon his good offices."

Courteney acknowledged that to doubt was to injure that friendship which had

been manifested towards himself in a variety of actions; yet the ingratitude of his own nature made him suspect *that* of others.

Morning came, and he hastened to the lodgings of his friend. Dudley received him with a smile of satisfaction—"Congratulate me, Leopold, upon my last night's success. I read your volume to lady Wilmington and her brother, and have not only to inform you that they admire it greatly, but that they requested me to procure them ten copies, and expressed a wish to be introduced to the author. Ha, ha! Leopold, when they look on your grave, demure visage—when they hear your sermons on morality and religious duties, how little will they dream what a sad profligate dog you are at heart! Forgive me, my dear fellow; but in looking this morning into my portfolio, I chanced to light upon one of your amatory pieces, of which, assuredly, no one who had either seen you, or heard your dis-

course,

course, would suspect *you* of being the author."

Courteney laughed in return—"I shall find you out some day or other," said he, "and then—"

"Well, and what then?" retorted Dudley, still laughing. "Remember, Leopold, that *I* am no *professor* of over-stretched morality; no dealer out of sacred maxims. I love, I adore women; but I never sully the purity of my muse in writing what they would, or *ought* to blush at perusing."

"You are a prudent fellow, I confess," replied Courteney; "and at least have the discretion to conceal, from your most intimate friend, the children of your gayer hours. But, Dudley, this hasty marriage of yours, how will it be received by the love-sick Clara? Poor girl! I fear it will hasten the lingering disorder which has so long preyed upon her existence."

The colour receded from the cheek of

Dudley;

Dudley; a sigh of tender commiseration, of affectionate regret, burst from his bosom. " Amiable and lovely Clara !" he exclaimed; " as a brother, I love and cherish your idea. Although my conscience acquits me of ever having, in any way, given occasion for Miss Melvill to suppose me attached to her, otherwise than as a friend, yet the conviction of her regard, of the hopelessness of it, and of the misery a mind like hers must endure—of the shock also which my marriage will give to her delicate frame, renders me unhappy. Even in the midst of bliss, of rapturous love, her form presents itself, and draws forth a tear of sad, of unavailing sympathy. I must, nevertheless, call on her mother; yet I dread to meet the fond inquiring eye of her daughter, or account for my silence during my visit to the Wilderness."

" It would be more charitable, perhaps," said Courteney, " to trust Miss Melvill with the secret of your union, than

than to make any excuses for your seeming neglect. It would also crush every lingering hope that love may have taught her to encourage."

"I could not do it *personally,*" replied his friend. "But it is time, Leopold, to think of preparing for our visit to the marchioness. That over, I will return with you to your Sybella." Then looking at his watch, he said, "We have yet half an hour to spare, which I will employ in giving you a sketch of those to whom you are going to be introduced.

"Lord Mortimer, the father of my beloved Althea, is the last male heir of that ancient family. His person is noble and dignified, and his manners are peculiarly attractive; his conversation displays a mind classically elegant, and highly cultivated. A lover of literature, he is the generous patron of talents and merit, wherever they are to be found; and pays more homage to a son of genius than to a son of nobility.

"In

"In his early years he was madly attached to a young lady, to whom he was affianced. I understood that the day had even been fixed for their nuptials, and every thing was ready for its celebration, when the night before that which was to have completed his happiness, the object of his adoration eloped with an officer of the army, to whom, it seems, she had been long and secretly attached. The severity of this loss was increased by the discovery that his rival was a distant relation, and his bosom friend. This circumstance, for a while, cast a gloom over the life of lord Mortimer. Another attachment, and a successful one, however, restored him to happiness.

"When Althea was seven years old, she lost her mother; and ever since that period, until a few months back, he has resided constantly at Mortimer Castle. Notwithstanding all lord Mortimer's good qualities and suavity of manners, he is jealous of contradiction; and, I think, if

opposed

opposed in any favourite project, would not easily be brought to forgive the offender.

"Lady Wilmington, his only surviving sister, is a character of great interest. Her person is naturally handsome, but rendered more so from the uniform sweetness of her temper, the genuine benevolence of her heart, and the delicacy of her mind, which is visible in all her actions. She has been a widow about fourteen months; and though formed to captivate, yet, if I may judge by the affection she bore her husband, no second choice will violate the sacred tenderness of her first.

"My Althea—but you shall judge, Leopold, yourself of *her* perfections. It is time for us to set out for the marchioness's."

Courteney, who had not been accustomed to the presence of nobility, unless to receive their orders during his residence at the bookseller's, felt rather awkwardly

wardly as he followed the servant up the marble staircase, to the drawing-room of lady Wilmington. The countess alone was there; and he recovered, in some degree, his presence of mind, on finding that he had only *her* eyes to encounter. Raising his own from the ground, at the sound of a soft, melodious voice, he hastened forward to receive the extended hand of the lovely countess. Lovely she indeed appeared; and Dudley read in the admiring looks of his friend all that he had expected. With an air of indescribable sweetness, she expressed the pleasure she received from being thus introduced to the acquaintance of one so highly esteemed by her Edmund—one whose own merits alone were a sufficient recommendation.

Thus encouraged, Courteney began to feel confidence in his own powers; and when lord Mortimer and his sister appeared, conducted himself with less embarrassment than he had expected.

They

They spoke of his poems with praise, and requested that their names might be set down for his next volume, promising to use their interest to procure him a long list of subscribers.

The children of lady Wilmington, who were returned from their morning's walk, now made their appearance, and gave relief to Courteney, who felt at a loss to express his thanks for the kindness thus unexpectedly bestowed. The marquis, a fine boy of six years old, and his brother, who was a year younger, immediately took possession of the knees of Dudley; while their sister, a lovely girl just turned of three years old, hid her rosy cheek in the bosom of the countess.

"You noisy little fellows," said the marchioness, "you are so boisterous, that you will give us all a headache. I believe, Mr. Dudley, I must apply to you for a remedy. Perhaps, amongst some of your acquaintance, you may know a worthy and deserving character, who

would take charge of my young rioters, and instruct them to read, and to behave better. They have got the ascendancy over nurse; and indeed I think it is time they should be transferred to a better director. I could wish them to receive their first education under my own roof; and if you will seek out for me some one worthy the trust, you will greatly oblige me."

Dudley promised to make inquiries for such a being as her ladyship was in want of; acknowledging that he thought his young friends were old enough to be placed under the care of a preparatory tutor. Some morning visitors now arrived, and he rose to take leave, lady Wilmington reminding him that they should expect him next day to dinner.

Dudley watched an opportunity to slip into the hands of Althea a little billet, and then withdrew, anxious to hear the opinion of Courteney respecting the beloved idol of his soul.

CHAP.

CHAP. III.

ONLY *one* opinion could be formed of the countess of Brandon. Her figure was tall, and gracefully proportioned; the tenderness of her heart, the benevolence of her mind, and the gentleness of her temper, were to be seen in her languishing black eyes; her complexion, inclining to the brunette, was enriched by the most vivid colour; every look, every word, every movement, bespoke a soul attuned to love, and all the dear delights of domestic life and connubial happiness. Educated in total seclusion from the world, with no companions but a father and a rigid governess, she passed her days in one dull monotony; while, as her years increased, her heart sighed for some other objects than her dog, her birds, or her plants, on which she could place her affections.

Circumstances had withheld her from the highly-valued society of her aunt. Lady Wilmington, until within the last four months, had resided abroad. The death of the marquis, although it deprived her of a husband to whom she was firmly attached, yet restored her to England, to her brother; and gave to Althea a relation worthy of all her love. The children of the marchioness were objects on whom she lavished the tenderness of her heart—on whom she bestowed her whole attention and caresses. Yet, when Dudley arrived—when he unfolded the inexhaustible richness of his mind—when he read or recited in a voice of thrilling softness—when she saw his large blue eyes sparkling with fire, or humid with tenderness—the children were forgotten, and all that had before engaged her attention. She could only think, dream, and gaze on Dudley.

All that affection which had hitherto been confined to her father and her

Castle

Castle playmates, now centered in him; and well might the youthful poet call forth the admiration and idolatrous love of the innocent and unaspiring countess. Lovely Althea! if thou rememberedst not thy exalted station, thy obedience and filial duty—if love alone engrossed thy mind, thy soul, let the wit, the eloquence, the genius, and last, the beauty of thy husband, plead thy excuse; for Dudley was cast in beauty's perfect mould; and though possessed of powers which might have misled the chaste, the prudent, and the wise, yet *his* was a heart true to every noble, manly, and generous principle; nor did there exist a being within the circle of his acquaintance that could say—" Thou hast deceived me."

The artless countess felt the value of such a man; and in selecting *him* for the partner of her life, felt that she was securing to herself a treasure, whose value would increase by possessing—a treasure of such magnitude, that to be mistress of,

 she

she cast aside her natural timidity, and even dared to brave the resentment of a father.

Eager to peruse the little billet of her husband, she hastened to her chamber, where first pressing it to her lips, she broke the seal. He complained that he had already suffered by the removal to town, since it had deprived him of those delicious opportunities of conversing alone with the object of his fondest love; and conjured her to think of some means by which he might enjoy that felicity.

No woman ever loved with greater tenderness than Althea; her very being seemed entwined with his; and the first deceit she had ever practised was on his account. To guard from the knowledge of her father and aunt her attachment, she found it necessary to be careful of every look, every action, lest her fondness should betray what at present she wished to be concealed. How, then, was it practicable that she should comply with

with the wishes of her husband and of her own heart? She rang for Mrs. Mason, in whose affectionate fidelity she could fearlessly confide.

This excellent woman had been brought up by the late countess of Brandon, whose foster-sister she was, and who, on that account, felt particularly fond of her. From the countess she received an education which rendered her a sensible and pleasant companion; and on her marriage with a son of lord Mortimer's steward, her mistress generously made her independent for life.

Mrs. Mason was confined with her first child when Althea was born; and anxious to testify her gratitude, volunteered to suckle the infant of the countess, whose delicate health deprived her of one of the most delightful duties of a mother. Mrs. Mason lost her baby, and shortly after her husband; in consequence of which she returned to the Castle, and became the principal attendant of Althea,

on whom she doted with all the fondness of a parent.

Before the decease of the countess, she promised to devote the remainder of her days to the offspring of her beloved mistress. True to her word, she had continued at the Castle during the education of her lovely charge, who, too young to remember her mother, felt towards her kind and gentle nurse all the love of a child; while *she*, unable to refuse her darling any thing, had been persuaded to be present at the private nuptials of the countess, secretly dreading all the while the consequences which might result from the anger of the earl.

Summoned to the apartment of Althea, she listened to the wishes of Dudley with silent attention, and felt at a loss how to advise or assist the countess in the interviews so ardently desired by both.

"Tell me, dear mother," said the lovely Althea, "can you devise any plan by which I may enjoy, unobserved, the company

pany of my adored Edmund? oh, if you can, you will make us for ever obliged to you."

"Your ladyship," replied the affectionate nurse, "knows full well how readily I obey all your wishes. But this is so fraught with danger, I tremble lest my lord should discover your marriage; and this very fear renders me incapable of assisting you under your present circumstances. Oh, my beloved lady! what would I give to have this terrible secret known to the earl, and to hear him pardon this first and only fault of yours!"

The countess sighed deeply—"Do not remind me of my sin, dear nurse! for though my unbounded affection for my Edmund has made me *appear* indifferent to my dear father's displeasure, yet my heart is but ill at rest whenever I think of the probable effects of his resentment. The only hope which I have arises from his partiality to Dudley, and the liberality of his own mind."

Mrs. Mason loved the countess too dearly to infect her with her own melancholy forebodings. Returning the embrace of Althea with maternal tenderness, she promised to think of some expedient which would enable her to grant the request of Dudley. The countess now returned to the drawing-room, where she found her father and aunt.

"Come here, my Althea," said the earl, "and tell me, love, which of those sets of jewels you admire the most. Jefferies has received my orders with respect to new-setting, against your presentation, the valuable diamonds of your mother; but I wish you to select what pleases you best, and wear them to-morrow, when you will be introduced to the duchess of Fitz-Aubin and her son."

The countess, confused, made choice of a beautiful set of amethysts; for she had heard Dudley praise the colour of that jewel, and it was him alone she wished to please. The morrow came; and

Althea's

Althea's heart beat high, as she read in the tender eyes of her husband his approbation of her appearance.

"Beloved Althea," whispered Dudley, "you look more lovely than usual. Alas, the poor duke! how would he envy me, did he but know the height of rapture to which you have raised me! But say, my adored, what answer to my note?"

The countess cast a timid glance to where her father was standing in earnest conversation with a gentleman, and then said—"Patience, my dear Edmund! we must be patient. Our worthy friend, Mason, will do all she can to serve us."

"I have hopes from another quarter, which seems to promise success to our wishes," replied Dudley; "you heard lady Wilmington apply to me yesterday, to look out for a tutor to her sons; and my friend, Courteney, will, I think, become a candidate for the situation. If he succeeds, we shall be indeed most fortunate, as my friendship for him will

be an excellent excuse for my passing some of my time in his chamber. Then, best beloved, I may snatch a few moments to enjoy all my soul holds dear."

The countess answered him by her eyes—more she could not do, as the servant announced the duke and duchess of Fitz-Aubin, and lady Sarah, her only daughter. The earl immediately hastened to receive them, and presented his blushing child to her noble relations.

Dudley was deeply interested in this interview; he watched the manly countenance of the duke, as he carried the white hand of the countess to his lips. His admiration was but too visible to the penetrating eyes of Dudley, and he immediately saw in his grace a rival of no common kind.

Lady Sarah, a tall, elegant girl of eighteen, with a face rather handsome than otherwise, expressed herself highly gratified at being thus personally known to one she had long esteemed; and hoped

hoped that the countess would consider her as a friend and sister. This last name called the blood once more into the cheeks of Althea. She however felt prepossessed by the friendly manners and smiling features of lady Sarah; and though she secretly knew that it was impossible she should ever become her sister, yet her heart willingly acknowledged her as a friend.

Although Dudley could have but little doubt what effect the beauty of his Althea would have on the duke of Fitz-Aubin, yet he felt uneasy and dispirited when he quitted the marchioness's. His grace had honoured him during the evening by a marked attention; and while Althea sung to her harp, had freely expressed his admiration of her person and voice, in terms which left him perfectly decided with respect to the intentions of the duke. Late as it was, he ordered the coachman to drive to the habitation of Courteney, to whom he imparted his fears concern-

ing the duke, and his hopes that he still continued inclined to become tutor to the earl's nephews.

Courteney desired nothing more than to be assured that the situation would be his; and promised, in that case, to befriend Dudley to the utmost of his power, in his secret interviews with the countess. This idea soothed the ruffled mind of the poet; and he returned to his lodgings, determined, next morning, to introduce to lady Wilmington the subject on which so much of his happiness depended.

The marchioness seemed delighted at the proposal, and instantly requested Dudley to offer his friend a liberal salary, and to express her wishes, that as soon as his affairs would permit, he would take up his residence in May Fair. The earl likewise testified his approbation at securing, as tutor to his nephews, a man of talent, and one whose grave, devout appearance, and pious principles, rendered

him

him admirably calculated for the sacred charge.

"But is not your friend, my dear Dudley, a married man? how then will he be able to support his necessary banishment from his family?"

Before Dudley could reply, the amiable sister of lord Mortimer said—"Tell Mr. Courteney that he is at liberty to go to his wife as often as he pleases, after his pupils are sent in to dessert, on those evenings that we stay at home. I am so anxious to have my sons placed under his care, that I shall be glad if he will call on me as early as convenient, that we may finally arrange the matter."

The heart of Dudley beat high with love and expectation at the prospects of accomplishing what he hoped would enable him to see, without witnesses, his beloved Althea. The marchioness invited him to accompany her and her niece in the carriage, as she was going to leave her cards, and to make a few

purchases.

purchases. To this he willingly assented, in the hope of being able to speak privately to the countess, who, judging of his wishes by her own, excused herself from alighting at one of the shops.

Dudley heard of her engagement the next day to dine at the duchess of Fitz-Aubin's with an emotion which was visible to Althea.

"My dearest Edmund," said she, pressing his hand, "why does this intelligence discompose you? am I not your wife? and is not *that* a sufficient security against the power of the duke? It is probable that I shall be compelled to go a great deal into company this winter; but you will be certain that the heart and mind of your Althea will not wander from you. No, dear Edmund, every moment that I can steal from observation shall be dedicated to your happiness."

The return of the marchioness prevented his reply; and in obedience to her desire, he attended them to give orders

ders for their court dresses, as they both expressed a wish to be directed in their choice by his well-known elegance of taste. Poor Dudley saw the preparations for introducing his Althea into high life, with no very enviable sensations; and could not help wishing, though in vain, that she had been born some humble cottage girl, far from the knowledge of a court, and all its vices.

It was not that he dreaded the baneful influence of fashionable levity on the pure mind of the countess; it was not that he feared the stability of her love for himself, or that she would ever regret the choice she had made; but he felt conscious that her person, all lovely as it was—her rank and large fortune, would secure a crowd of admirers; that the earl would naturally advocate the cause of one of them; and that Althea would then be compelled to acknowledge her marriage—a thing ardently to be desired, and yet secretly dreaded by

them

them both. He was also aware, that the constant round of company which she would soon be obliged to keep, would rob him of a great portion of her society; and Dudley loved with no common ardour. Scarcely could he restrain the violence of his passion within the limits of reason—scarcely could he endure to live a day, an hour, without beholding his sweet Althea.

Lord Mortimer and his sister were strongly attached to him, and were equally desirous of shewing off to advantage his splendid abilities. They requested him to honour all their parties by his presence; and spoke of him to their friends in terms of esteem and affection. Yet, supported as he was by the consciousness of his undoubted superiority over most of their noble acquaintances, Dudley felt a pang whenever the painful idea obtruded itself, that he might be deemed, by these amiable friends, an ungrateful, selfish, and interested dissembler.

bler. In those moments of self-reproach he derived comfort from the tenderness, the undeviating affection of his Althea, who, concealing her own secret disquietude, never failed to restore the mind of Dudley to its natural serenity.

Courteney, elated at the prospect of so lucrative a situation, more than by the real service he might afford his friend, put on one of his demure looks, and hastened next morning to the marchioness. Gratified by his readiness to take charge of her sons, and still more so by his fixing on an early day for that purpose, lady Wilmington, in the sweetest manner, assured him, that in return for the care and attention which he would bestow on her beloved children, every thing should be done to make his situation as little irksome as possible. She thought it, however, but just to inform him, that the dispositions of the young marquis and his brother would require different treatment. The former was a

high-spirited boy, already too conscious of his rank, impatient of contradiction, passionate to an excess, spurning at control; yet affectionate, forgiving, generous, and benevolent.

"With the marquis, I fear, you will have much trouble," said his mother; "but the gentle and endearing disposition of lord Edwin will make you some amends. The docile temper of that dear boy will enable you, without any exertion, to mould him to your wishes."

Every thing being settled to his satisfaction, Courteney, with little reluctance, prepared to quit his wife and family, to enter upon his new avocation. Sybella saw him depart with a sadness of spirit which she strove to repress. In vain her sister reminded her, that the considerate marchioness had given him leave to visit her at every favourable opportunity; Sybella wiped away her tears, and pressed still closer to her bosom her little boys.

"Ah, my dear Maria! too long has

The mind of Leopold panted for liberty, too long has he desired an event like the present. Sick of our domestic misfortunes, weary of his increasing embarrassments, and totally unable to brave the poverty we so frequently endure, he has at length escaped from the home which his own want of fortitude and perseverance has helped to render miserable; nor will he return, my sister, unless his circumstances enable him to move in that sphere of life of which his spirit has always been ambitious. Dudley, I am certain, had our interest at heart, when he consented to propose him to lady Wilmington. The situation, I confess, is a desirable one, and may be of great advantage to him; but I feel that our separation will not be a short one. I dread even more than I dare own to you."

"Dearest Sybella, you cannot inform me of any thing that my affection for you has not already discovered. Yet give not way to despair. Your patient

endurance

endurance of unmerited insults, your uniform kindness and forbearance, may reclaim my brother, and convince him that you are worthy of a far different treatment—a much happier destiny."

"And have *you*, my Maria, discovered what, even to myself, I have endeavoured to deny? alas! then it is too true I have lost all power over the heart of my husband! Oh, my dear mother! how severely does your daughter suffer for her blind partiality! What had *I* to do with a man of letters? what had *I* to do with poetry and literature? Far better would it have been for me had I married the worthy man whom your good sense had selected as the partner of my days! then I should have been the wife of an honest tradesman—should have been a respectable, a happy woman."

Maria, with difficulty, succeeded in restoring her afflicted sister to composure. "Moderate your grief, my dear Sybella; be assured that we shall be the better for

this

this change in Leopold's affairs. His salary is a handsome one, and he will let you have all that he can spare of it. You and I will immediately try to procure some fine work, which, with economy, will enable us to live comfortably, and, unknown to him, appropriate his remittances to pay off, by degrees, some of those debts Leopold's love of good eating and drinking obliged us to contract. Do not despair, my sister. Happier hours are yet in store for you; and, be assured, that while I can be of the least service to you or your dear boys, I will never quit you."

The sisters affectionately embraced; and Sybella felt more at ease from this last proposal of Maria's. She resolved next day to go to a large childbed-linen warehouse in the city; and by giving proper security, procure for herself and sister what would enable them to enjoy some of those comforts they had only

tasted

tasted at intervals, during the period of several years.

CHAP. IV.

Courteney was now become a resident under the same roof with his friend's beautiful wife. Her father treated him with marked respect, and paid the utmost deference to his religious principles and poetical talents. Lady Wilmington did more; she studiously sought to render his situation as agreeable as possible, judging, with great liberality of sentiment, that she could scarcely do too much for the man who devoted himself to the health, happiness, and welfare of her children. Before he had passed three months with the sons of the marchioness, he had acquired their obedience and affection,

fection, and the good opinion of the whole family, who deemed him a pattern of devotion, and every other virtue. Already had he received several valuable presents from the earl and his sister, who both agreed in considering themselves infinitely obliged to Dudley, for recommending so worthy, so good, so pious an instructor.

Courteney, who never lost sight of his own interest, had, to do him justice, taken great pains with the young marquis and his brother; and had succeeded, in a wonderful degree, in taming the boisterous and almost unmanageable disposition of the former; while the sweet and tractable temper of the latter made him easily conform to all the rules of his preceptor, of whom he became extremely fond.

The partiality which the boys evidently manifested for Leopold, made him an object of still greater importance in the family. Their mother felt towards

him all the warm gratitude of a parent doting on her children; and she noticed with pleasure that Dudley gave to his friend a larger portion of his time than she had at first thought he could well spare.

Lord Mortimer also considered it as a mark of generous friendship; for although every thing was done to render the life of Courteney pleasant, yet as the whole of his days were spent with his pupils, the earl justly concluded, that at no time could Dudley evince his regard for the comforts of his friend more than at the present. It is true, that whenever they had merely a family-party, Mr. Courteney was invited to join it in the dining-room; still the marchioness, as well as her brother, feared lest the constant confinement should become irksome to him, and finally be the cause of their losing this exemplary character. Again, it was to be dreaded, that when the month arrived which was fixed for their removal

to

to Mortimer Castle, the tender feelings of a husband and a father would, perhaps, outweigh those of gratitude and attachment, which he expressed for his pupils and their relations.

Could lady Wilmington have seen into the soul of Courteney, she would have discovered that nothing was farther from his intention than returning to his own family. The fears of Sybella were not totally groundless. He had, indeed, been long weary of the occasional deprivations which his own extravagance brought on him; and now that he possessed the means of indulging his appetites, and of mixing with his superiors, he determined that no fault, no remissness, on his part, should bereave him of the comfortable situation which he enjoyed.

Once or twice in the course of the week he had his evenings to himself, and it was generally supposed that they were passed with his wife and children. This was not always the case. Fortunately,

however, the worthy Sybella and the amiable Maria were ignorant of this cruel neglect, nor imagined that any of his leisure hours were devoted to any other beings than themselves.

Courteney soon perceived the ascendancy he had gained over the minds of the earl and his sister, and determined to turn it to his own advantage. The lovely countess behaved towards him in a manner so friendly, so affectionate, so highly flattering to his vanity and self-love, that Dudley was more than ever the object of his jealous envy; and he actually became so strangely infatuated with himself, as to believe that had he been single, and the first man of talent introduced to the countess, that her heart would have readily made the same sacrifice in his favour. Compelled to assist Dudley in his stolen interviews with Althea, and frequently to be a witness to their chaste and delicate tenderness, his envy increased; and he conceived the base and horrible design

sign of separating, if possible, two beings who lived but for each other, and to whom he was under the most lasting obligations. To effect this, without its being known who was the secret agent of their ruin, required all his consummate hypocrisy; and even with that, it would be no easy matter to accomplish a deed well worthy of a demon's soul.

The countess had been presented at court, and had gained the admiration which her loveliness could not fail to inspire. Since then, the house of the marchioness had been crowded with visitors; the chief of whom were drawn there by the beauty and fortune of her niece. Among these who openly avowed themselves her willing captives, was the duke of Fitz-Aubin; and *he*, perhaps, was the most formidable of any. Distantly related to the earl, and possessing every qualification of person and mind that could render him worthy of the countess's hand, her father scrupled not to avow

his hopes that his grace would be the man selected by his Althea for a husband; while lady Sarah, the duke's only sister, so warmly advocated the cause of her brother, that the blushing countess, who felt a sincere affection for her ladyship, found it difficult to reply to her pointed observations, or evade the penetrating glances of her inquiring eyes.

Dudley had passed many evenings in the society of lady Sarah, who professed great veneration for talents such as his; she frequently spoke of him to the countess, when they were talking confidentially, and after descanting upon his wit and eloquence, usually concluded by extolling his handsome features, his brilliant blue eyes, and manly form. The carnation which deepened on the cheek of the countess created suspicions in the mind of lady Sarah respecting the state of her friend's affections; but she never dreamed that a girl of her high rank could cherish any serious wishes for

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one so much her inferior. Considering it, therefore, as a transient prepossession, her ladyship continued to plead for her brother, and to increase the embarrassment of her lovely friend.

The constant round of company kept by the marchioness allowed Dudley but little time to converse with his Althea; and those moments snatched from dissipation were insufficient to satisfy a heart doting to madness, and unable to exist without an equal return of fondness. Althea beheld the uneasiness and discontent of her Edmund with serious disquietude; yet how to remove it she was ignorant. The apartments allotted to Courteney and his pupils were on the same floor with her own; this enabled her often to enjoy half-an-hour's conversation with Dudley; yet was it not free from observation; and those who have felt what it is to love with purity and delicacy, will easily enter into the feelings of the countess and her husband, upon

being obliged to restrain the tenderness of their words and actions in the presence of a third person.

The second volume of Courteney's poems was now preparing for the press, and his friend was again solicited to correct them. This naturally obliged Dudley to pass some part of each day in the apartment of Leopold; and the evening was chosen as the most proper time for such an occupation, when the sons of the marchioness were gone to dessert. Courteney could not, with decency, frame any excuse to avoid going to his wife; and yet, had he been able, he would, for he knew in his absence his generous friend would most probably enjoy unobserved, for a few minutes, the conversation of the countess. But he determined that his absence should be as short as possible, and even hoped that she might be prevented from tasting such unexpected pleasure.

The deity who presides over connubial love

love (if such there be) was more propitious to the ardent hopes of Dudley than his false friend. Althea, on quitting the dining-room, hastened to her chamber. She had to pass that of Leopold. The expectant husband heard her light step, and rapturously pressed her to his bosom.

"My adored Althea!" said he, "I am alone. Let us seize the precious opportunity of conversing unrestrained by the presence of our mutual friend."

"First, my dear Edmund," replied the countess, "let me ring for Mason; and she shall watch during our conference, lest we should be interrupted."

Disengaging herself from the arms of her husband, the countess summoned her faithful nurse, and then hastened back to the chamber of Courtenay. Dudley again enfolded her in his arms: his fine eyes no longer sparkled with brilliancy, they were now humid with tenderness,

and his expressive features wore the hue of sorrow and discontent.

"Oh, best beloved!" he exclaimed, "when, oh, when shall I be permitted to enjoy the luxury of thy dear society? when shall I be allowed to claim my bride, to avow publicly my adoration? I can no longer bear the restraint imposed upon my feelings. Althea, my soul's idol! are you not my wife? why then refuse to let me claim you as such? why tremble at the supposed displeasure of your father, when the love, the undeviating affection of your husband shall make amends for whatever deprivation your temporary estrangement from your family may create? *I* also shrink from the just reproaches of the earl; for have I not robbed him of his dearest treasure? yet, my beloved, to gain the felicity of openly calling you mine—to inhabit the same house—to see you constantly before my eyes—to receive hourly some fresh

proof of your tenderness—to slumber nightly on this faithful bosom—oh, Althea! what would I not brave! speak, my sweet wife! are you prepared for the disclosure of our marriage?"

"Not yet, dearest Edmund," replied the countess; "my father appears to have set his heart upon my union with the duke of Fitz-Aubin; and I have not courage to own the fallacy of his hopes, and my own want of duty, until I am compelled. Wait, therefore, with patience, a little longer, beloved Dudley."

"A *little* longer, my Althea, you said a month ago. My patience is quite exhausted; indeed, my love, you must not rely upon it any more."

"Yet grant me this one favour, Dudley—let me remain under the same roof with my dear father while I have the power; soon, you know, I shall be *obliged* to quit it."

Dudley caught her passionately to his

breast, and fondly kissed her burning cheek.

"My own adored Althea," he cried, "with what an increase of extacy shall I hail the auspicious birth of our first pledge of mutual love, since to that blissful event I am to owe the entire possession of my Althea! Yet, dearest, is it prudent to delay too long a disclosure, the effect of which may injure your health and spirits? I will not deceive you, my love; I expect that at first we shall suffer equally from the anger of lord Mortimer. Let me then confess our marriage, while you are strong enough to endure his resentment."

The countess, however, entreated her husband to comply with her wishes—"Yield to me in this one instance, dear Edmund," said she, "and I will be your obedient wife the rest of my life."

Dudley consented with a bad grace, yet found it impossible to deny the request

quest of his Althea, who reluctantly tore herself from his arms, to join the family in the drawing-room ; while Dudley consoled himself by reflecting, that in less than three months the birth of his child would unavoidably oblige its mother to avow their union.

Courteney, on his return, heard with vexation of the interview which had taken place, and he listened to the hopes and fears of his friend with silent attention ; yet his countenance betrayed not the inward malignity of his soul.

" Perhaps, my dear Leopold," said Edmund, " you think me to blame in yielding to the desire of Althea ; but had you beheld her sweet eyes—had you heard her persuasive tongue plead against the fond wishes of her heart, you could not have resisted its syren eloquence."

" No, my friend," replied the dissembler, " I do not blame you for granting the request of the countess, I am only surprised that she should make it. But,

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my dear Edmund, women, you know, are changeable creatures, full of whim and caprice; and there is no remedy against the principal fault of the whole sex."

"What do you mean?" inquired the husband of Althea, with a serious accent.

"Oh, nothing, but what is very natural. It occurs to me, that the countess can have but one reason for wishing to keep secret her marriage—a little female love of coquetry and admiration, which is very excuseable in one so handsome and so young. She knew not her own powers until she was introduced into life; is it then to be wondered at, that she is in no hurry to relinquish her claim to the general homage she receives?"

"Is this your serious opinion, Leopold? am I to believe that you class the countess amongst those women whose levity of manners has induced you to pass so severe a censure upon the sex?"

"Do not look so grave, Edmund; I

mean

mean not to ascribe any thing to the countess that need call forth a frown from her husband. Young, beautiful, and rich, the only child of lord Mortimer, and a peeress in her own right, can you suppose that she is not already the idol of many a noble heart? do you think her more perfect than any other woman, that you should seem half-inclined to quarrel with your friend for asserting that the admiration she receives is not displeasing to her? believe me, Edmund, you are not so well acquainted with the sex as I am."

"Perhaps not," coolly replied the offended husband of Althea; "but, Leopold, as you live under the same roof with the countess, I wish to know if you have any grounds for your supposed cause of her reluctance to disclose our marriage?"

Courteney too well perceived that he was on the losing side of the question, and that nothing was to be gained by

vainly

vainly endeavouring to weaken the confidence of her husband. He therefore assured him that he had no cause for what he had uttered, further than what his general opinion of women suggested.

The countenance of Dudley again became placid; for he was well aware that Leopold's *opinion* even extended to his own wife and sister. Yet with this knowledge, Dudley thought highly of him in other respects; and frequently lamented that his friend had early been thrown into the society of persons whose conduct and loose morals had given him an unfavourable idea of all women.

Dudley, during his correction of the poems, had several similar interviews with his beloved Althea. Again he pleaded, with almost irresistible eloquence; yet the countess still entreated for further time.

"How anxiously, my adored Edmund," said she, "do you now solicit

to

to have me entirely to yourself! will you always retain the same wish? oh! when we are settled in our long-talked-of cottage, with no other society than our dear baby, and a few chosen friends, say, Edmund, will the presence of Althea *then* constitute your all of happiness?"

"Yes, most adored, most idolized!" replied her husband, pressing her rapturously to his heart; "within the magic circle of these snowy arms, all my felicities reside. But say, my Althea, will not the life we have selected tire by its uniformity? will you not, amidst the retirement of our intended residence, sigh for London, and some of its most rational amusements?"

"Cruel!" said the countess, as she parted the dark locks which overshadowed his forehead, and imprinted on it a tender kiss; "can you admit one doubt of my constancy, my obedience, my fixed devotion to yourself?"

The heart of Dudley was full. Turning

ing his expressive eyes on his affectionate wife, she perceived a tear bedim their usual brightness.

"Do you suspect my assertion?" said she, in a trembling voice.

"No, dearest; but shall I confess a weakness, which I am ashamed to own even to my Althea? at the moment my soul ought to have thrilled with extacy at thy matchless tenderness, a sickness came over me—my heart sunk within me—a sudden moisture filled my eyes—and I felt as if some heavy calamity was at hand. Your smile, my angelic wife, while it reproves my folly, reanimates my drooping spirits. Oh, my Althea! secure of thy love, what have I to fear? but say, my beloved, have you fixed on the time and manner of discovering our union? shall I first confide it to your aunt, and implore her mediation in our favour, or shall I boldly cast myself at the feet of the earl, and know at once my fate?"

"Neither,"

"Neither," replied the countess; "for I feel that I shall never be able to face my father during his first transport of anger. I mean, my dear Edmund, to take advantage of a masked ball, which will be given by the duchess of Fitz-Aubin on the seventh of next month, and elope with you under favour of my disguise. My faithful Mason shall convey to your lodgings all that I may wish to take with me, and be the companion of our flight. You, my dearest Edmund, in the mean time, must look out for a retreat, not very far from town, where we may reside, until my dear father pardons this sole act of my disobedience."

Dudley approved of this plan, yet felt uneasy that it was not to be executed sooner—"You intend then, my Althea, to go to court on the king's birthday? Why, my dearest life, do you expose yourself to such unnecessary exertion and fatigue? why will you not quit this house before the fourth of June? Surely

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the alteration in your figure cannot have passed unnoticed."

The countess blushed deeply—"The air of London agrees so well with my constitution," said she, "that the roundness of my person is attributed to that: You must indulge me, my beloved Edmund, in giving me the time I have fixed on. My gratitude shall make amends for your compliance."

Dudley assented; yet with a heaviness of heart, a depression of spirits, which he could not account for. He flung himself into a seat, after the countess had left him, and remained wholly absorbed in the melancholy which continued to gain upon him. On the return of Courteney he raised his languid head, and pressed the hand of his false friend.

"I have not done much for you to-night, Leopold, for I have got a most tormenting headache; I might say too, a heartache."

"Heaven forbid! my dear Edmund; but

but what is the matter? have you and the countess differed in opinion? you expect too much, I know, from a mere mortal—or has the earl thrown out any hints that he suspects your attachment?"

"Neither; but I feel all the horrors of one who is on the point of losing every thing most dear to him; and yet I have no just grounds for my presentiment of evil."

He then recapitulated part of the conversation which had passed between himself and the countess; and inquired whether Leopold did not approve of her plan?

Courteney, with secret exultation and a sardonic smile, replied in the affirmative—"Banish this singular despondency," said he; "trust to the fertile genius of woman for planning and executing an elopement. Courage, my friend! soon will you be possessed of your soul's idol—soon will you taste the raptures of her society, and the luxuries of her large estate. Why, man, you look as dismal as if

if the earl had avowed his intention of setting aside your marriage."

Dudley started from his chair, walked across the chamber, then laying his hand on the shoulder of Courteney, he said—"No, Leopold, I will not harbour an idea so injurious to the honour, the humanity of lord Mortimer. He may exile me from his presence, but he will never rend asunder those sacred bonds which have bound me to his daughter. Is there a man, once a husband and a father, possessing a heart alive to those endearing names, and a soul noble and generous, that would seek to separate two beings fondly attached to each other? oh! if there does, may the vengeance of Heaven pursue him through the world! may he, in his last moments, vainly sigh for the tender hand of a wife, a child, to close his dying eyes! may—"

"Stop, stop! my friend," exclaimed the self-convicted hypocrite; "waste not your breath on an imaginary being.

I trust

I trust that *you* will never experience any heavier calamity than what arises from the first burst of lord Mortimer's displeasure,"

Far different, however, were the real wishes of Courteney—"Fool!" said he to himself; "would nothing satisfy thy ambition, thy self-created consequence, but marrying the daughter of an earl? yes, yes; soon shall thy forebodings be verified—soon shall the earl be undeceived in the opinion he has formed of thee; and *then* thou wilt reap the fruits of thy *golden* harvest! Idiot! to suppose that lord Mortimer will overlook such flagrant presumption. And thou, rash girl! whose baby heart was first attracted by the *person* and *splendid* talents of this vain man, shall quickly be compelled to abandon him and his child for a more suitable alliance."

The principal part of the night was devoted, by Leopold, to reflections on the most eligible and prudent way of effecting

effecting the ruin he meditated. Had there been any chance of succeeding, he would have endeavoured to weaken the attachment of the countess, to raise her suspicions of the *disinterestedness* of Dudley's love, and finally to convince her that his heart was devoted to another at the time that he solicited her hand. This, however, he knew to be impracticable. The countess loved with enthusiasm, and confided implicitly in the tenderness of her husband.

Once, as if by accident, he mentioned the name of Clara Melvill; then, with well-dissembled apprehension, entreated her not to intimate to his friend that he had done so. The countess, as he had foreseen, inquired the reason; with an air of mysterious confidence, he stated the unfortunate attachment of Miss Melvill, and attributed her increasing ill health to the discontinuance of Dudley's visits and correspondence.

Tears flowed from the dovelike eyes of

of Althea; she felt all the distress and hopeless destiny of Miss Melvill; but not for an instant did she imagine that her Edmund was to blame. The wily hypocrite perceived that *here* no advantage was to be gained; pity was the only sentiment he had excited, and that was not to his purpose. His chief consideration was, therefore, in what manner he should discover to lord Mortimer the marriage of the countess and Dudley, preserve the good opinion, and ensure the gratitude of that nobleman, without appearing to come forward as the betrayer of his friend.

The generous kindness of Dudley he had experienced in a hundred various ways; he was by no means desirous, however, of feeling his resentment. To be the agent of his destruction, (which he believed would follow the disclosure of his marriage,) he was almost ready to risk even that, yet he still hoped to bring

 about

about his ruin; and, like the hired bravo of Italy, give the mortal stab, while the hand that directed the blow should remain unseen and unknown.

CHAP. V.

While Courteney was anxiously planning the ruin of all his friend's worldly happiness, Dudley was exerting the whole of his interest to enlarge the list of his subscribers; and as he was well aware of Mrs. Melvill's extensive acquaintance, he determined to solicit her assistance in favour of Leopold, notwithstanding his own reluctance to see either that lady or her daughter. He had called twice since his return to town, and had been so fortunate as to chuse those days when they were both from home. He was not now,

however,

however, equally successful, as Mrs. and Miss Melvill were alone in the drawing-room.

The pale, emaciated appearance of Clara almost overcame the sympathizing heart of Dudley; he pressed her transparent hand to his lips in silence; while the fair invalid, deeply affected by the presence of a man long and tenderly beloved, fainted in the arms of her mother.

The distress of Dudley increased; he saw her slowly recover; he would have spoken, but that he dreaded to trust his voice with sounds which might be construed into more than brotherly affection.

"It is many months since we had the pleasure of seeing you," said Clara, faintly; "but I rejoice to learn that your absence has been caused by your attachment to a noble family, of whom sir Thomas Percy speaks in the highest terms. In the friendship of the countess of Bran-

don it is hardly to be wondered that my mother and myself were forgotten."

Dudley coloured, and stammered out something, in the form of an apology, for what appeared like neglect. Then turning to Mrs. Melvill, he solicited all her interest for his friend Mr. Courteney. Clara immediately requested him to put down her name for three copies; then rising, she slowly quitted the room, the mere shadow of what she once was.

Mrs. Melvill looked after her with tearful eyes—"My beloved Clara," said she, "is considerably altered for the worse, since you saw her last autumn. In a few days we are going to Clifton, as a last resource. Alas! Mr. Dudley, I have no hope—no hope! would to Heaven that I were as resigned as the dear girl is herself!"

Dudley could no longer restrain his feelings; his tears flowed with those of Mrs. Melvill, who, taking him affection-

ately by the hand, said—"Forgive the weakness of maternal love, which prompts me to betray my child; but, in confiding to *you* the secret which consumes her, I feel that I am only doing justice to the sensibility of your nature, and the honour of your principles. Dear Mr. Dudley, it is love that hastens my adored Clara to an untimely grave—love the most ardent that ever inhabited the human heart! yet delicacy and virgin bashfulness plead so powerfully within her, that chance alone discovered to *me* the object for whom she dies."

Dudley trembled violently; he would have given up part of his existence to have been spared the remainder of Mrs. Melvill's speech; she continued—

"I had long suspected *who* was the deserving man that had gained, by his own merits and virtues, the heart of my child; yet, unwilling to question her on a subject which she always avoided, I continued silent upon that which was of the utmost

importance to her health and happiness, as well as my own peace of mind. During her late severe illness, I was sitting by her bedside, watching with anxiety her short and unsettled slumbers, when I perceived on the floor a little silk case, which I knew my beloved Clara always wore in her bosom. On taking it up, my first impulse was to put it into her cabinet; till recollecting that its contents might justify my suspicions, I opened what contained the cherished treasure of my unhappy child."

Mrs. Melvill paused for a moment; then fixing her eyes tenderly on Dudley's pallid face, she thus resumed—

"My doubts immediately vanished, when I beheld, carefully folded in a sonnet addressed to herself, a watch-chain, which she had taken on giving a new one to the author of the poem. A few lines on the back of it, written by herself, betrayed the fervency and hopelessness of her attachment. Ah! Mr. Dudley,

need

need I confess the name of this highly-adored being—need I implore him to commiserate the feelings of a mother, whose only daughter, scarce in the prime of her existence, is now sinking to the grave? Oh, my friend!" she continued, pressing his hands to her bosom, " on *your* word hangs the life of my Clara—'tis *you* alone that can restore to me my child!"

Dudley, shocked and embarrassed beyond measure, had but one line of conduct to pursue in this painful exigency—he flung himself on the couch by the side of Mrs. Melvill, and in a voice scarce audible from his emotions, confessed his marriage, and consequent inability to realize her hopes.

The mother of Miss Melvill, after the first shock was over, which this sudden and unexpected intelligence had given her, affectionately embraced him—" My dear young friend," said she, in a voice of dreadful despair, " you have robbed me of my last hope! yet I have no cause to

 reproach

reproach you for the miseries you have unintentionally brought on me and my unfortunate daughter. I feel assured that our affections are not dependant on our own will, else my Clara's virtues and accomplishments might have secured yours; and I should then have had to rejoice at her felicity, instead of mourning over her fixed and irremediable wretchedness. She knows not, however, of the discovery which I have made; yet, with your permission, I will gently break to her the secret of your marriage. If her disorder is not too far gone, the certainty that *all hope* is annihilated may enable her to banish, by degrees, from her mind the image of one who *now* never can be hers."

Dudley was too sensibly affected to reply. He embraced, with filial affection, the weeping mother of Miss Melvill, and hastened to the coach, which, fortunately for him, he had kept in waiting.

A week had scarcely elapsed, when he received a note from Mrs. Melvill, requesting

questing him to call on her in the course of the day.

"I have disclosed," said she, "to Clara the secret of your marriage, and rejoice to find that she bears the intelligence with a degree of fortitude and composure which I had not expected, although her bodily weakness has increased—'Tell Mr. Dudley, my dear mother,' said my noble child, 'that as his happiness has always been nearest my heart, that heart cannot but exult at the discovery of his felicity, and the prospect of his enjoying all those blessings which mutual love and affluence will procure. Tell him, that if he can spare half-an-hour from his happy countess, it would afford me the highest gratification to assure him personally, that the friendship which for five years has known no interruption, until within the last twelvemonth, has on my part received no diminution. I would write to him myself, but that I feel unable to hold the pen."

Dudley, although not recovered from the shock he had sustained by the conversation of Mrs. Melvill, and conscious that such an interview would be productive of the most painful emotions, yet prepared to execute the wishes of her daughter. He was engaged to dine at the marchioness's, to meet a large party, and afterwards to go to the opera. To do both was impossible, as his visit to Miss Melvill would totally incapacitate him from seeing company. Humanity and gratitude instantly decided in favour of the invalid; and Dudley sent an excuse to lady Wilmington, with a few lines to his Althea, enclosed to Courteney, explanatory of the real cause of his absence.

On his arrival at Mrs. Melvill's, he was shewn into the chamber of Clara, who was lying on a couch, evidently too enfeebled to sit up. Her mother, at her request, assisted her to rise; and Dudley,

seating himself by her side, raised her parched hand to his lips.

A hectic colour flushed her cheeks, and gave a lustre scarcely mortal to her eyes. She smiled on him with ineffable sweetness, as she witnessed the starting tear of sympathy, and felt his hand tremble in hers.

"How kind of you, my dear friend," said she, speaking with difficulty, "to pay such attention to my wish! My dear mother has confided to me the blissful news of your good fortune—of your happiness! oh, may it never meet with the slightest interruption! may your Althea prove herself deserving of her happy destiny! You thought me unworthy of your confidence—unworthy to be trusted with the secret of your attachment! yet our long acquaintance, our steady friendship, should have taught you that the heart of Clara beat with no common feelings—that her friendship was of no common nature! Forgive me, Edmund; I

see I distress you—but it is for the last time."

Her weakness increased, and Mrs. Melvill expressed her alarm lest she should injure herself by her present exertion.

"Fear not, my mother," replied the lovely sufferer; "I shall soon be well!"

Then turning to Dudley, she asked him some questions respecting the countess and her family. His agitation affected her.

"My dearest friend," said she, "for such I must still call you, even were your Althea present, compose yourself; I know the tenderness of your heart—you are shocked at my appearance—at what my lingering disorder has made me suffer. I shall not suffer long; the consciousness of *your* happiness will—"

She paused, and cast a look towards her mother, which Dudley too well understood.

Miss Melvill opened a small red case, and took from it a ring set with pearls, and

and a watch-chain of her own hair— "Will you accept of these, my friend, and wear them for my sake? did the countess know of our friendship, and of the love I bear herself, as the object necessary to your felicity, she would not refuse your wearing the hair of one whose prayers have always been offered up to Heaven for your prosperity, and who feels as deeply interested for its permanency as herself."

The colour deepened on her cheek. Dudley took the ring and chain, and pressing them to his lips, assured her that he would retain them during his life, and that they would be equally sacred to his Althea.

Miss Melvill retook the ring, and gazed on it for some minutes attentively, till her physician was announced. Dudley knew, by the sudden change of his countenance, that he thought his patient considerably worse than he had expected to find her. After chatting for a short

time, he requested to speak to Mrs. Melvill, who followed him into the drawing-room, with breathless solicitude.

Miss Melvill endeavoured to smile—"I know the opinion of doctor Bennet—he cannot hide from me the impossibility of my recovery. My dear mother—it is for *her* I feel!"

Then placing the ring on the hand of Dudley, she appeared overcome by painful recollections; and unable to support herself, sunk nearly lifeless into his arms.

Greatly alarmed, he would have rung for assistance; but she made an effort to prevent him. The tears of Dudley fell on her face, which rested on his bosom, while his arms supported the skeleton remains of a form once round, graceful, and glowing with youthful beauty.

"Edmund," feebly articulated the dying Clara, "to be thus supported in my last moments is a blessing beyond my hopes! oh! when this care-worn frame shall be consigned to its last earthly habitation—

bitation—when this heart no longer throbs with pleasure at the sound of thy voice, or thrills with rapture at the touch of thy hand, let my memory be dear to thee. Amidst the sweets of domestic love, even in the arms of Althea, do not forget the unfortunate Clara, who now, when the chill hand of death presses heavy upon her, proudly acknowledges the long-cherished tenderness which consumes her."

Dudley was no longer master of himself; he burst into a violent paroxysm of tears, and strained the dying martyr to his bosom; even the countess, at that moment, was forgotten: he saw only the expiring Clara, and heard only her last words, which still vibrated on his ears.

Nature made another effort. Opening her languid eyes, she fixed them gratefully on the adored countenance of Dudley—"I die contented—happy—I feel that I shall not be forgotten—that I possess

sess all you have to give—my mother—my dear—mother—"

She sunk again on his bosom.

Dudley rung the bell with violence, then flung himself on his knees by the side of Miss Melvill, and pressed her hand passionately to his lips. The departing spirit was arrested in its flight by the agony of Dudley. Once more she half-opened her eyes—a smile of angelic sweetness overspread her features—again they closed—it was for ever!

Mrs. Melvill and the physician hastily obeyed the summons of Dudley, whom they found prostrate on the floor, in a state of insensibility. The despair, the agonies of the broken-hearted parent recalled him to life; and doctor Bennet humanely took him home in his own chariot, as soon as he could with propriety quit the distracted mother of Miss Melvill.

Dudley was aware of the very natural construction which the physician would

place

place on what had passed; and therefore invited him in when the carriage stopped at the door of his lodgings.

Doctor Bennet immediately adverted to the sudden death of Miss Melvill; and advised her supposed lover to retire early to bed, and take a composing draught, to allay the nervous irritability he was suffering under.

Dudley thanked him for his friendly advice; and unwilling that he should leave him under a false impression, he mentioned his long friendship with Mrs. Melvill and her daughter; adding, that had she been his sister, he could not have felt more keenly her loss.

"Pardon me," replied the doctor; "but I had conceived, from the wonderful difference which took place in Miss Melvill within these few days, and from your looks, that your feelings were of a more lively nature; of hers I can have no doubt. My opinion, from the first moment I was called in to prescribe, has invariably

invariably been the same; but I distress you—forgive me—the subject is a delicate one, and I have not the honour to possess a claim to your confidence.

Dudley shook the friendly physician by the hand; his heart was too full to admit of ceremony; and doctor Bennet, while he listened to his deep distress at the untimely death of so young, so amiable a woman, felt for him a regard which every moment increased. He took leave of him with reluctance, strongly recommending him to keep as tranquil as possible, and promising to call the next day. Dudley expressed his hopes that the doctor would not forget his new patient.

"Do not fear *that*," replied the physician; "I have always endeavoured to guard against being governed by first impressions; but, in this instance, I feel that I cannot check them. You may depend on seeing me, but remember, it must be as a *friend*."

In saying this, he hurried down stairs,

leaving

leaving Dudley as much pleased as the nature of his feelings would permit with his new acquaintance.

There was something particularly prepossessing in the venerable looks of doctor Bennet, and still more so in his mild, humane, and benevolent manners. Dudley was soothed by the parental kindness of his attentions to himself; and his heart seemed to feel assured that the friendly professions of the physician were to be relied on, should he ever have occasion to put them to the test.

Deeply affected by the mournful scene which he had witnessed, he could not refrain from tears of affectionate regret, as his fancy dwelt on the last moments of the dying Clara. Drawing from his bosom the miniature of his wife, he pressed it in speechless agony to his lips; at length he exclaimed—" Adored Althea! even in your arms my tears would flow for my unhappy friend. Oh, my soul's dearest treasure! should you ever be

be snatched from me—should I be fated to mourn over the loss of all my heart holds dear—should it be the will of Heaven to wrest from me my Althea, my present sorrow would be light, for my existence is entwined with thine, and madness or death must ensue! Dearest," he continued, looking fondly on the serene and heavenly countenance of his absent wife, "oh that at this moment I could be folded to thy faithful bosom, could hear the sweet tones of thy melodious voice, and receive consolation in the assurance of thy love! Alas! shall I ever enjoy the luxury of calling thee wholly mine?"

Dudley found himself too unwell to sit up; he therefore retired early to bed, but not to rest; the image of the dying Clara haunted his slumbers; and when doctor Bennet called the next morning, he found him in a high fever, yet persisting in his determination of rising, and going to lady Wilmington's.

His

His new friend, with gentle kindness, remonstrated on his rashness in persevering to act against the advice of his physician; and Dudley, softened by his solicitude for his welfare, assured him that he was compelled to go out, but that he would otherwise follow implicitly his prescriptions. The doctor smiling, said—"Provided, my dear young friend, that they do not interfere with your own private inclinations."

Dudley looked a little confused, and changing the subject, inquired if he had called on Mrs. Melvill?

"No," replied his new friend; "but I am now going there. We professional men are early initiated into scenes of distress and misery; happy do I esteem myself when circumstances will permit of my blending the characters of friend and physician." Again he counselled him to nurse himself for a few days—"I like not," said he, "this tendency to fever; you must check its progress, before

fore it assumes a more alarming aspect. I shall look in upon you to-morrow, and shall hope to find that your own good sense, and my prescriptions, have had the desired effect."

No sooner had the sound of the doctor's carriage announced his departure, than Dudley leaped out of bed, and dressed himself with incredible swiftness, to visit his Althea. More than once he was obliged to sit down, from weakness, and a swimming in his head; resolved, nevertheless, to go, he ordered a coach to be called, and proceeded to the house of the marchioness, in a state of bodily derangement truly alarming.

Fortunately for Dudley, lady Wilmington and her brother were from home. The countess knew his step, and met him at the door of the drawing-room. His appearance, the flush on his cheek, and the burning heat of his hand, terrified her; she flung her arms round his neck, and sobbed aloud, as he sunk on the couch.

In

In vain he assured her that his illness was of no moment, that he should soon be well, and that he already felt the powerful influence of her presence; the affection of Althea would not so easily be satisfied. Gazing on him with the tenderest fondness, she said—"You deceive me, my Edmund; your love for me has tempted you to come out, when you should be in bed. Oh, my beloved husband! remember the life of your Althea, of your child, hangs on your own."

She pressed her sweet lips to his. Dudley clasped her to his bosom—"Fear not, my adored, for your Edmund; I feel better since I have seen you. But tell me, dearest, did you bestow a thought on me during my painful absence of yesterday? ah, my love! you little knew the trying scene I had to go through."

He then briefly recounted the necessity of his attending the summons of Mrs. Melvill; and touched, as lightly as he could, upon its fatal termination.

The

The countess wept over the untimely fate of the amiable unknown, and felt that her Edmund was become more dear to her, by the sensibility he had manifested for the unfortunate Clara.

Willing to change a subject painful to them both, she reverted to what was still dwelling on her mind; and entreated him to return home, and have the first medical advice, promising to send Mason in the evening with a letter from herself to console him, and to hear how he was.

Dudley consented to obey her wishes, yet felt unwilling to quit her. He inquired if his absence had been regretted by her father or aunt?

"By both of them," replied the countess. "As for myself, I fear that I played the hypocrite so ill, and concealed my chagrin so wretchedly, that it was observed by the earl, who more than once asked me if I was unwell. So completely did my mind wander to you, that the

duke

duke of Fitz-Aubin spoke to me several times, without my being conscious of it; and lady Sarah made me quite uncomfortable, by her sly looks and whispers. I fancied (at least I hope it was only fancy) that my father appeared displeased; and I was compelled to have recourse to my old excuse—a sick headache. The duke looked grave for the remainder of the evening; and I should have been happy had his sister been affected with his taciturnity. At the opera, my thoughts were not more collected; and I never enjoyed the solitude of my own room so much as on my return, for then I could taste freely the luxury of contemplating the resemblance of him who, though absent from my embrace, yet lived in my heart, and kept possession of my thoughts."

Dudley kissed her blooming cheek—"Sweetest Althea, as you value my peace, hasten your departure from this house! I wish not to infect you by fears which

seem groundless; yet I can scarce believe that such exquisite bliss is in store for me, as to possess entirely, and to live under the same roof with, my beloved Althea. My adored wife! the excess of my tenderness makes me tremble at the idea of any harm that may happen to you; the bare possibility of which robs my nights of their accustomed repose. From dreams of happiness I wake feverish and unrefreshed. In vain I stretch forth my arms, and call on my Althea, my wife—she hears me not—she is unconscious of my distress. Oh, my beloved! already have you estranged yourself too long from the husband who adores you, and who lives but for you! Shorten, then, our cruel separation; and let us fly to that retirement so congenial with our dispositions and our mutual love."

"Ah, traitor!" cried the countess, "you have chosen a moment to plead your cause, when your own illness, and

my weak, foolish heart, renders it impossible to deny your request. Find, therefore, a temporary abode to receive us, and I will no longer resist your entreaties, but accompany you to it, as soon as it is got ready. Nay, moderate your transport, my Edmund; I, in return, beseech you to attend to the advice of doctor Bennet, and remain at home all this day, to nurse yourself. This you must promise, or I will not—"

Dudley stopped her mouth with his kiss; and as he really found himself still unwell, agreed to her desire; though had he followed the bent of his own inclinations, he would have gone immediately in quest of a house, and have carried off in triumph his Althea the same night.

Wishing to speak to Courteney, the countess accompanied him to his apartment, where their new arrangement was confided to the keeping of this treacherous enemy, who, with every appear-

ance of affectionate solicitude for their welfare, approved of the design, and prayed to Heaven that nothing might happen to delay the completion of their happiness.

On Dudley's quitting the chamber of Courteney, he heard the voice of the earl in the drawing-room, and hastened to pay his respects to him. Not as usual did the earl greet his young favourite. Coldly expressing his sorrow at hearing of his illness, his lordship turned to the countess, and told her that he was rejoiced to see her so perfectly recovered from the indisposition of yesterday; and as they were going to a musical party at the duchess of Fitz-Aubin's, he hoped she would not have any return of her headache.

The countess blushed, looked confused, and left the room; while Dudley, who had been accounting to lady Wilmington for his absence, felt himself hurt and surprised at the sudden change in

the manners of the earl, and withdrew shortly after.

CHAP. VI.

Dudley had no sooner quitted the marchioness's than lord Mortimer proceeded to the apartment of the countess, whom he found in earnest conversation with Mrs. Mason, who retired on his entrance. Lady Caroline, his sister's little girl, was playing on the floor with some of the countess's trinkets. Running to her uncle, she climbed his knees, to receive her accustomed kiss, and then seated herself in the lap of her indulgent cousin.

"My Althea," said the earl, tenderly taking her hand, and placing himself by her side, "I wish to speak to you on a subject which is of importance to the happiness of your father, and, I hope, equally

equally so to yourself. You have long known that it has been the chief wish of my heart to see you married to the duke of Fitz-Aubin; his rank, his personal accomplishments, his disposition, and principles, all render him worthy of your affection. I have not hurried on the match, my dear girl, because I was desirous that you should know a little of the world and its customs before you became duchess of Fitz-Aubin. The delicate attachment of his grace has hitherto kept him silent. Perhaps, also, he had another motive, my Althea, for not explicitly declaring to you his ardent passion—a motive which must raise him in your opinion, but which, I trust, is causeless. The high estimation in which we all hold young Dudley, your retired education, and ignorance of life, my child, has led you to express yourself too freely, and to shew more interest in the welfare of Edmund than a girl of your age and high rank ought to do. I would not check

check the amiable sincerity of your nature, my Althea, were it not liable to wrong constructions. That you should be sensible to the merits and superior talents of our young friend, is what I expected; but my dear girl must not forget the exalted situation in which she was born, the character she has to support in the world; she must repress the exuberance of her friendly sentiments, lest they should be supposed to spring from warmer feelings."

The countess coloured deeply; her confusion was noticed by her father, who continued—" My dearest Althea, why this embarrassment? you blush, my child, at the possibility of so improper a report becoming current. It is my duty, as a father, to speak more explicitly. Yes, Althea, it is with the deepest regret that I am forced to assure you, that it is this supposition alone which has kept the duke from more openly avowing his tenderness; and I this morning learnt from

his mother his delicacy and his fears. Confident that they were groundless, I assured her of his error; and that such an idea might be for ever stifled in its birth, I proposed that his grace should immediately follow the dictates of his own heart; and in becoming your husband, prove the falsity of his own suspicions, and those of others. You are silent, my daughter. Believe me, nothing else is left to convince the world of its mistake; and though I can make allowance for your surprise, in having innocently given rise to so erroneous an opinion, yet, after what I have said, my Althea, I shall expect that you are more guarded in your future conduct to Dudley, and less reserved towards the duke, whom you will henceforward receive as one shortly to become your husband."

The earl rose, and embraced the countess, who, trembling with the consciousness of having acted with duplicity, dared not encounter the eyes of her father—

ther—

ther—"To-night, Althea, let your behaviour convince his grace that you are sensible of the fault you have, through your ignorance, committed; and that you are willing to listen to his offers and his love."

Saying this, lord Mortimer quitted the chamber of the countess, who, as she wept at the recollection of the pain her disobedience would cause her father, felt some relief to her sorrow in calling to mind the worth of *him* for whom she had braved her parent's displeasure.

The little daughter of the marchioness, by every childish artifice, tried to stop her tears—"Nasty duke!" said the lovely prattler; "I will never kiss him again, if he makes you cry. I don't like him so well as I do Mr. Dudley—do you, Althea? shall I go and fetch him to comfort you?"

"No, my darling," replied the countess, kissing her rosy cheek, and fearing the influence of her innocent tongue;

"it is not the duke that has made me cry; but I fear my dear father is angry with me."

"Oh! I will go and fetch him back."

The countess, however, succeeded in quieting her little favourite, and then consigned her to the care of her maid. Ringing for Mrs. Mason, she repeated to this faithful woman what had been the subject of the earl's conversation.

"Since there is no remedy, my lady, for what has happened, I think, with Mr. Dudley, that the sooner you quit this house the better. Your present situation will not admit of much longer concealment; and I already tremble lest you should injure yourself by your endeavours to conceal the alteration in your shape. Tenderly as the earl loves you, it would be highly improper for you to encounter his resentment, until after your confinement. Do then, my dear countess, hasten as much as possible your departure."

"I have

"I have to-day consented to the constant pleadings of my Edmund," replied his Althea; "and you, Mason, shall call at his lodgings to-night, with a letter from me; but as he was very unwell, say not a word of my father's intentions, or the duke's suspicions, lest they should increase his illness. Ah, Mason, how comparatively light my heart will feel, when this important secret is divulged! yet it will require all the matchless tenderness of my Edmund to hush the upbraidings of my own conscience, when I have flown from the protecting arms which have fostered me with all a parent's fondness during my infancy. Father of Heaven! forgive this first act of disobedience, and grant that the dear infant which will shortly see the light may not, in its turn, make me feel the bitter pang of an ungrateful and self-directed child! Mason, I fear that my uneasiness, last night, has hastened my fate."

"Probably it may; but your ladyship

must not suffer it to affect you. It is what you ought to have been prepared for; I only wonder that my lord did not suspect your attachment long ago. Harris has spoken to me, in confidence, on the subject, several times; but knowing his high veneration for his master, and the earl's great regard for him, I was always careful of my replies, though I believe Harris too much attached to your ladyship to betray, even to my lord, any thing that would give you a moment's pain."

"I value him much," said the countess, "for he has grown grey in the service of my father; yet, Mason, I would not tax his fidelity so severely as to entrust him with a secret of such importance to the peace of his master. No, my dear nurse, you only are fit to be the confidant of my—imprudence, I would have said; but whenever I mean to accuse myself, the image of my beloved Dudley comes across my mind, and charms

charms away my penitence and self-reproach. So dearly do I love that dangerous pleader, that were I stripped of rank and fortune, and turned adrift in the world to earn my own bread, joyfully would I clasp the author of my ruin to my heart, and in his arms find a remuneration for the loss of all."

"Alas, my lady!" replied the intelligent nurse of Althea, "your words and looks so strongly remind me of the late countess, your exemplary mother, that I could almost fancy I saw her now before me."

"Indeed, Mason! surely my dear mother could have no cause to express herself in the same terms as her daughter? Married to my father, by the consent of her family and her own heart, she must have been a stranger to the hopes and fears which agitate mine."

Mrs. Mason shook her head, and sighed deeply—"Would to Heaven that

your opinion was true! then, perhaps, my angel mistress might have still existed; and by her presence and advice have guided and assisted your ladyship under your present difficulties."

"You surprise and alarm me," replied the countess. "Dear Mason, I know how highly you were valued by my mother, and that it was her last wish that you should never leave her child. Be more explicit; fear not to trust your Althea with the secrets of that beloved parent, whose loss your watchful tenderness has so faithfully endeavoured to supply."

Mrs. Mason returned the embrace of the countess with maternal fondness, and promised, at a more convenient time, to gratify her very natural curiosity— "What I shall have to relate," said she, "will not assist to exhilarate your ladyship; and therefore I could wish to postpone my narration until a future opportunity.

opportunity. All that we have now to consider is, the hastening of your departure from this house."

The countess reluctantly assented to the prudent wishes of her nurse. Her spirits were low, from the conversation of the earl; and she began to feel, for the first time, some of those forebodings which had tormented the beloved cause of her disobedience.

Ill calculated to disguise her feelings, or wear an air of cheerfulness foreign to her heart, the countess's looks were not such as to inspire the duke with those delightful hopes which the assertions of her father had in the morning given birth to. In vain he exerted all his eloquence, and fascinating talents, to secure the attention of the beautiful daughter of lord Mortimer. He found her cold and unmoved by his tender assiduities; and he more than ever felt his former suspicions confirmed, that her affections

affections were engaged to young Dudley.

He had accompanied her in an exquisite Italian air, the tenderness of which had been keenly felt by himself. His own ardent passion was to be seen in his expressive features, and in the touching languishment of his fine eyes; yet those of the lovely countess bore no testimony of reciprocal emotions. His grace sighed as he led her from the instrument; while lady Sarah rallied her unmercifully upon her insensibility.

The countess felt that she was not insensible, blushed, and looked unusually embarrassed.

As soon as her tormenting friend had left her, the duke ventured to take her hand, and pressing it gently, said—"Dearest Althea, I will no longer distress you by my attentions; I feel my own inability to inspire you with that affection which consumes myself. I do

not

not reproach you with indifference or coldness; no, enchanting girl; a form, a face, a mind, like yours, betrays no want of sensibility. I alone am to blame. Had I been so fortunate as to have seen you earlier, I might, perhaps, have been more successful. Start not, beloved Althea; fear not my jealousy. Although my passion can never abate—although my love will continue while I exist, and prevent my espousing any other, yet so dearly, so purely, do I adore you, that I sacrifice my own happiness to promote yours. Beloved Althea, I resign all pretensions to the glory of calling you mine. Think not of my sufferings in so doing; think only of my friendship; tax it to the utmost; you shall find me worthy to be trusted. Do not tremble, Althea; I know your secret attachment—I lament it, even more for your sake than my own. Can I assist you? can I serve you? confide in the honour of him who would die to ensure your felicity."

Surprised,

Surprised, confused, yet trembling with gratitude and admiration, the countess nearly fainted in his arms. Recovering, however, by the assistance of his smelling-bottle, she gave him a look which almost repaid him for what he had suffered.

"Do not distress yourself, my adored friend," said the duke, "to reply to me—I know what you would say. Suffer me to call on you to-morrow; I wish to speak to you alone. Yet fear not my intentions; believe me, I have only your interest at heart; and how to secure it will now be the sole object of my studies."

He rose, and hastily quitted her, leaving her deeply impressed with the noble generosity of his conduct.

"Such a man," thought the countess, "is worthy to become the friend of my Edmund. How incessantly shall I pray for his repose, and that he may be able to transfer his affections to one capable of returning them!"

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With sickening apprehension she perceived the eyes of her father were directed to herself the whole of the evening; and in spite of the noble friendship of the duke, she returned to her home in worse spirits than she had left it.

The first inquiry of the countess was after her beloved Dudley. Mrs. Mason presented her with a letter from him, which considerably relieved her anxiety on his account. He was better than he had expected, and attributed it solely to his having seen her in the morning. He purposed going out early the ensuing day, to fix on a retreat suitable to receive his adored Althea; and dwelt with rapture on the happiness they should enjoy in each other's society, uninterrupted by the presence of any intruders.

With all the solicitude of real tenderness, the beautiful wife of Dudley questioned her nurse respecting his looks, and all that he had said. The answers of Mason contributed to compose her mind;

and

and she retired to rest full of love for her husband, and gratitude for his generous rival.

Not so lord Mortimer; his suspicions had been awakened by the restless uneasiness which the countess had displayed at the absence of Dudley, and her manifest indifference to the affectionate attentions of the duke of Fitz-Aubin. Alarmed at the possibility of what he now, for the first time, began to suspect, he ran over, in his own mind, the conduct of the lovers since they had met. A variety of little circumstances now occurred to his recollection, which strengthened his fears; and the friendly conversation which took place between himself and the mother of the duke next morning, served only to increase his terrors.

From what he had said to the countess on his return from her grace, he fully expected to have seen the duke meet with a far different reception. During the whole of the evening he carefully watched

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the looks and actions of his daughter; but neither afforded him any consolation.

Dotingly fond of this only hope of his family, he yet felt that should she really have allowed her affections to become engaged to Dudley, and continued to persist in refusing the love of the duke, he should exert all his parental authority to convince her of her folly, and to compel her to unite herself with one preeminently qualified to render her happy.

He now, for the first time, intimated his painful suspicions to his sister; and felt some consolation that *she* had not observed any thing which could authorize them. Still he was not satisfied; it was an affair of too much importance to pass over lightly; and he determined to trust in the grateful protestations of Courteney, and confide to him his unpleasant surmises.

At any other time, and upon any other occasion, the noble mind of lord Morti-

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mer would have scorned to question the tutor of his nephews; yet now he anxiously sought a conference with him, and even scrupled not to solicit his confidence in return.

This was more than Courteney had dared to hope for—*this* was beyond his most sanguine expectations. It was now in his power to effect the ruin of the unsuspicious Dudley, eternally oblige his lordship, ensure his own present good fortune by the gratitude of the family, and betray his friend, without appearing to be the willing agent of his destruction.

Lord Mortimer noticed not the malignant exultation which flushed the cheek, and gave a momentary fire to the eyes of Leopold, who, with all possible humility, and well-dissembled sorrow, lamented that any thing had occurred to give his lordship pain, and hoped that his fears were unfounded.

The earl fixed his penetrating eyes on

those

those of the HYPOCRITE, who immediately cast *his* on the ground, with well-feigned confusion, as if unable to encounter the keen glance of his lordship.

"I appeal to you, Mr. Courteney," said the earl, "believing you to be a man of strict honour and integrity, and feeling conscious that you have the power to relieve my present anxiety, or to confirm my fears. You have the means of rendering me the most essential service—of making me your debtor for life; and though I honour you for seeking to conceal the errors of your friend, yet, in this instance, you may, by betraying him, preserve him from eternal misery, and save the dignity of a family whose gratitude to yourself can never cease, and who will sacredly conceal the name of him to whom they are indebted for its preservation.

Courteney tried to appear more and more embarrassed; he took care, however, that his looks should confirm the suspicions

suspicions of lord Mortimer, who said—"You are but a bad dissembler, Mr. Courteney. In the expression of your countenance I too plainly perceive a confirmation of all my doubts. Your friend has proved unworthy of my regard. Forgetful of the vast difference between him and the countess of Brandon, he has arrogantly presumed upon the esteem and notice which he has met with, and, perhaps, has even dared to raise his aspiring thoughts to the possession of her hand."

"Compose yourself, my lord, I beseech you," replied Courteney; "my friend may have been seduced to love, by the matchless beauty of the countess, but he would never be so base as to solicit or expect a return. Think, my lord, how great has been the temptation which he has constantly been exposed to, from almost daily associating with her ladyship—from being treated with parental kindness by yourself, whose liberality of

of mind may, perhaps, have contributed towards his presumption. Relying upon your lordship's kindness and generosity, as well as the friendly conduct of the countess, my poor friend may have yielded involuntarily to the alluring situation in which he has been placed."

"No, no, Mr. Courteney," hastily exclaimed lord Mortimer; "your friendship may seek to gloss over the ingratitude of human nature, but it cannot excuse the violation of the implied confidence which was reposed in Mr. Dudley. Introduced into my family by sir Thomas Percy, his talents, his merits, his fascinating eloquence, soon rendered him the object of our regard and attention. I know not that I ever thought so highly of, or felt more interested for, any man before, save one, whom he strongly resembles; and *he* also basely betrayed my confiding tenderness, and stole from me a treasure, at that time far dearer than existence."

The earl paused, as if labouring under some painful recollections; he then continued—"I would not allow myself to be prejudiced against Dudley, because his features and manners reminded me of a perfidious relative; but, on the contrary, freely bestowed on him all the notice and kindness of which I believed him worthy. I consider myself, Mr. Courteney, as the most unfortunate of men, the most unhappy of fathers. No alternative is left me but to see my only child, whose rank and beauty ought to place her in a still more exalted station, become the wife of a young man, an orphan, whom nobody can even tell from what family he sprung, or to what name he has a right—or, by exerting my authority as a parent, become, perhaps, her destroyer, and sacrifice the best and sweetest affections of her soul to the dignity of her birth, and the opinion of the world."

Tears gushed from the eyes of lord Mortimer,

Mortimer, and he covered his face with one hand, while with the other he pressed that of Courteney.

"My dear lord, you affect me; I cannot bear to see you thus.—Oh, Dudley, my friend, my imprudent friend!—I am distressed, perplexed, and scarce know what I say, but that your lordship may command me to the utmost of my abilities in this unhappy business."

"Thank you, my worthy friend. With shame and bitter anguish I confess to you, that it is my fixed opinion that the countess loves this rash young man. The coldness of her behaviour to the duke of Fitz-Aubin, contrasted with the animating pleasure she evinces at the appearance of Dudley, too well justify my suspicions. Tell me, Courteney, with sincerity, do you not believe that she is attached to your friend?"

"I know not how to reply, my lord," said the wily dissembler; "I dread to add to your present agitation; yet since

you have condescended to honour me with your confidence, and appealed to my sincerity, I am unwillingly obliged to acknowledge that I have long entertained the same suspicions; and once I saw—but, my lord, as nothing but the respect and gratitude which I feel for your lordship and the marchioness could induce me to betray the frailty of my friend, I trust that no consideration will prompt your lordship to hint even that your knowledge of the fact was obtained from me."

"On my honour, and the word of a gentleman, I promise that your name shall never escape my lips. But what did you see?" hastily inquired the earl.

"With sorrow I shall repeat it," continued the false friend of the generous Dudley; "I had been out one day with my beloved pupils, who, on our return, went into the drawing-room, and I proceeded to my own apartments. I heard the voice of the countess, speaking in accents of

of tenderness to some person. Wondering who it could be, and what could induce her ladyship to visit my chamber, I hesitated whether I should enter. The door was not entirely closed; and on moving forward, I perceived that her companion was my friend. The affectionate familiarity of his reply to what she had said, the rapture which glowed in every feature, as he pressed the countess to his bosom, surprised, alarmed, and convinced me that my fears were just. But you are pale, my lord; lean on me for support; recover yourself, my dear lord, all may yet be well."

With difficulty lord Mortimer kept his seat; he gasped for breath; and Courteney saw that for the completion of his plan, enough had been said. The secret of their marriage he determined should be divulged by the countess herself.

"Oh, my Althea!" groaned the agitated father; "and is this the reward of

all my constant solicitude—of my unwearied care to render you worthy the rank for which you were designed! The ingratitude of Dudley is light, when compared to thine! Where was the blushing modesty, the virgin delicacy, which shrinks from the gaze of man, and for which she has always been admired? where was it when she permitted that daring youth to violate the sacredness of her person—when she condescended to listen to his presumptuous passion?"

"Alas, my lord!" replied his demoniac hearer, "you forget that love, like a staunch republican, brings every thing to its own level."

"True," said the earl; "but since the countess has forgot what is due to herself and me, I must lose no time in deciding upon the best and most effectual means of restoring her to a just sense of the unpardonable impropriety of which she has been guilty. She must be instantly

stantly removed to a place where her lover will not find it either safe or easy to have access to her."

The earl then quitted Courteney, to communicate to his sister the painful discovery which he had made.

Lady Wilmington heard it with unfeigned regret. She esteemed Dudley, and loved her niece; yet she perfectly coincided in the opinion of her brother, with respect to the removal of the countess, while she felt most keenly the necessity which compelled him to have resort to a measure that must appear strange and mysterious to all their acquaintance, who knew that he had fixed his departure for the middle of June; it would likewise confirm the suspicions of the duke and his mother, whom she advised her brother to trust with the disagreeable secret.

Lord Mortimer approved of this suggestion, and retired to write to her grace,

 and

and to give private orders to Harris to make ready for his intended journey.

CHAP. VII.

While the fate of the countess was thus hastily decided on, she was anticipating pleasures which she was destined never to enjoy. Her interview with the duke of Fitz-Aubin served only to increase her admiration of his character, and to heighten the esteem which she had ever felt for his virtues.

Prompted by the noblest solicitude for the peace of her whom he no longer considered as his future wife, his grace requested a private conference with the youthful countess; and when they were alone, entreated her to forget his former pretensions, and to regard him only in the light of a brother.

"I beseech,

"I beseech you," said the duke, "to repose the same confidence in my honour and affection as if I were really as closely related to you. Tell me, amiable Althea, can the interest which I possess be exerted to serve the fortunate, the happy Dudley? Command my fortune—my power—myself! All that I seek is the promotion of your happiness—all that I possess is valueless in my eyes, unless it can be rendered serviceable to you."

The countess, unable to reply, pressed his hand to her lips, in token of her gratitude. A tear fell on her own, which the duke hastily kissed off.

"Adorable Althea! sister! friend! do not doubt my professions."

"Oh! I do not doubt," faintly replied the lovely wife of Dudley; "but my surprise, my admiration, at such unexpected goodness, prevents my doing justice to my own feelings."

"Dearest Althea!" exclaimed his

grace, "I wonder not that your astonishment should be excited, that one who, like me, is sanctioned to solicit *your* hand, not only quietly resigns it to another, but even entreats to be made the instrument of raising his rival to an eminence more worthy of you. Oh, Althea! can any thing more forcibly speak the disinterestedness of my passion, the purity, the tenderness of my love? Doting on you to madness—conscious that no other woman will ever be able to efface your image from my mind; I yet voluntarily resign you, dooming myself to be for ever an alien to that bliss which my imagination had vainly pictured would be my lot as your husband!. Dudley's adoration cannot exceed mine! Say, Althea, would *he* make an equal sacrifice? have I not some claim to your *friendship*, if not to your *love?*"

"The strongest," replied the countess, with quickness, while the tears of affectionate gratitude trembled in her eyes; "your

"your grace will ever hold the *second* place in my heart, will ever be next to him who alone possesses the power to have rendered me insensible to worth like yours. A time may come, and that not far distant, when I may claim your generous interference in my favour. Forgive me if I do not speak more explicitly. Deeply impressed with a sense of your kindness and generosity, be assured that while I exist you will ever be dear to me; and that, in the course of a few days, you will be convinced of the readiness with which I shall solicit the aid and counsels of my adopted brother."

"Beloved sister! for such, in spite of the tumultuous throbbings of my bosom, I will call you, trust me, that when that happens, you shall find me all that you wish. Should the earl inquire the cause of my present visit, let him believe that its object was to declare my love, and that you neither refused nor accepted my proposals. Tell also the enviable

the highly-favoured Dudley, that in sacrificing to him my prior claim to the possession of a treasure which in my estimation is matchless, that no lukewarm passion influenced my conduct; the soul of Fitz-Aubin is devoted alone to the happiness of Althea, to secure which he yields to him the woman whom he idolizes, and asks only in return, that he will guard with unceasing care the idol of our mutual adoration."

Fearing to trust any longer to his own feelings, the duke took leave of the countess, more in love, if possible, than ever, yet firm in his resolution of nobly sacrificing every personal consideration of felicity to promote hers.

Contrary to the expectation of her ladyship, lord Mortimer did not ask a single question concerning her private conversation with his grace. His opinion was fixed, his plan was formed, and it only remained for him to announce it to his daughter.

This,

This, however, it was not his intention to do until after they had left town, lest she should find an opportunity to convey the intelligence to her lover. His lordship therefore merely requested her to be ready early the next morning to accompany him upon a visit, which might detain them a week or ten days.

The countess, astonished at the suddenness of the journey, timidly inquired if she might not be informed the name of the friend to whom they were going?

The earl, forcing a smile, replied—"that he meant to surprise her, and should therefore keep her in suspense, until they arrived at the place of their destination."

She next applied to her aunt; but lady Wilmington evaded her questions; and, as they were engaged that evening to a large party, advised her to lose no time in giving the necessary orders to Mason, as the earl intended to set out by six in the morning.

The

The distressed Althea no sooner communicated her journey to her faithful nurse, than the affectionate creature immediately suspected its real import. Unwilling, however, to infect her beloved child by her fears, and hoping that they *might* be unfounded, she proceeded to pack up what she thought would be requisite, should their stay be of a longer duration than lord Mortimer had mentioned; while her mistress sat down to write the unwelcome news to Dudley, whom she expected to call in the course of the evening.

Convinced how severely he would feel her absence, and at a time when he was fondly anticipating her speedy elopement, the countess affected a gaiety of style which ill-accorded with the heaviness of her heart. She promised to write to him as soon as she arrived at the house of her father's friend; and bade him not give way to useless vexation, since her journey might ultimately prove for-

for the best, as she determined, should her father prolong his visit, to fly to the open arms of her dear and best-beloved Edmund. This letter she entrusted to the perfidious Courteney; conjuring him to do all in his power to sooth and comfort his friend.

Had the heart of the hypocrite beat with one pulse of humanity, he would have been softened by the interesting situation and looks of the lovely countess; yet Courteney, unmoved, beheld one of the most amiable of her sex on the eve of being torn from all she valued in the world. Her youth, her beauty, her kindness towards himself, even the conviction that he was striking deep into the heart of Dudley—of *him* whose ready friendship had so often saved his family from despair, and himself from a prison, had no effect on the base, malignant soul of Leopold. He took the letter from the sweet victim of his treachery, and promised

mised what he never meant to perform—to deliver it to her husband.

Lord Mortimer now called his beautiful daughter, who, with her aunt, accompanied him to lady Beaumont's. Here they were joined by the duke of Fitz-Aubin and his mother, to whom the earl imparted the motive of his intended journey.

The duchess, who was good-nature itself, lamented that so unpleasant a circumstance should have happened—"But, my dear lord," said the old lady, "let us hope that it is merely a girlish predilection, and that absence from the object of it will, ere long, restore to us our Althea. My son shall follow you as soon as you think fit to invite him. In the mean time, my friend, do not afflict yourself too heavily; for I am convinced that Althea's love and duty is so great, that when she is removed from the sight and conversation of young Dudley, your advice

vice and authority will have its due effect upon her mind."

"Heaven grant it may!" replied her father. "Under this flattering hope I mean to stop at the Wilderness until after the birthday, when my sister and her family will join us. We shall then proceed to the Castle, where I trust your grace and the duke will pass the remainder of the summer, and where I will still allow myself to hope will be celebrated the nuptials of my misguided child. Should I, however, be deceived in my opinion of Althea's filial reverence, your grace shall be instantly informed of my disappointment. In that case I shall lose no time in securing her within the walls of Mortimer Castle, and safe beyond even the possibility of Dudley's seeing her."

"Such a measure will not, I trust, be necessary," replied the duchess. "Althea is so gentle and affectionate, and my son's good qualities are so numerous, that

I will

I will not relinquish the pleasing expectation of yet calling her my daughter."

In the course of the evening the duke, who had been informed by his mother of the earl's disclosure, sought an opportunity to speak to the countess, of whom he inquired Dudley's address? On seeing her look surprised, he said,—"My dear sister need not hesitate to make me acquainted with the abode of Mr. Dudley; it may be in my power to serve him most effectually."

The countess immediately gave his grace the address of her husband.

"Thank you," said he, pressing her hand tenderly, "for this implied confidence. You leave town early in the morning; should you stand in need of a friend, remember, beloved Althea, to apply to Fitz-Aubin."

At the approach of lady Sarah he quitted her; but his look and manner sunk deep in the mind of the countess. She wished, yet could not find an opportu-

nity.

nity of speaking to him privately the remainder of the night. The earl, remembering his journey, returned home earlier than usual; and the countess, glad of the same excuse, hastened to her chamber, where Mrs. Mason attended her.

"Has my Edmund been? is there a letter, nurse?" were the first inquiries of the wife of Dudley.

"He has not called, my lady; but here is a letter enclosed to me, as Mr. Dudley feared that your ladyship would not be at home time enough for Mr. Courteney to give it you to-night."

The countess hastily broke the seal, and kissing the well-known characters, felt her spirits revive, as he assured her that he was perfectly recovered from his indisposition. His next intelligence, however, gave her no small share of uneasiness; he had seen a most desirable habitation for their temporary abode, and meant to call on her next morning,

to describe its situation, before he finally agreed to take it.

"Alas!" exclaimed the countess, "what will my dear Edmund feel on finding that I am gone from here? Oh, Mason! will he not reproach his Althea for refusing to consent to his wishes! Already I feel convinced that I have been to blame; and would give the world to avoid this journey. Would to Heaven that I could escape to-night!"

"That is impossible," replied Mrs. Mason; "it is too late to execute such an imprudent and dangerous idea. Your ladyship must keep up your spirits. If the worst comes to the worst, we can apprize Mr. Dudley of our residence; and with him for a protector, you need not fear to leave the guardianship of my lord."

The countess sighed deeply, then took up her pen, and wrote a few lines in answer to the letter of her beloved Edmund.

—"You

—"You must contrive, nurse, to see Mr. Courteney before we set out. It is of consequence that he should give this, with my other letter, to his friend." Then taking a light, she proceeded to the nursery, to give a parting kiss to her little favourite.

Short and disturbed were the slumbers of the innocent wife of Dudley. The paleness of her cheek, and the languor of her eyes, intimated to the watchful earl the unsettled state of her mind. Her aunt, early as it was, had risen to take leave of them. Affectionately embracing her niece, lady Wilmington said —"Dearest Althea, I shall think it long until I see you again, and shall hasten my own departure as much as possible."

"What do you mean, my dear aunt? surely my father will not remain with his friend longer than he told me?"

"No, no," replied the marchioness, confusedly; "but I had some intention of fetching you home myself."

Lord

Lord Mortimer, taking the hand of his daughter, now hurried her to the carriage, followed by Mason, whose suspicions were greatly increased by this speech of lady Wilmington's.

The earl was unusually talkative. He saw and pitied the dejection which was but too visible on the countenance of the countess. Redoubling, therefore, his affectionate attentions, he tried to draw her from her melancholy reflections, without letting her perceive that he noticed her uneasiness.

Grateful for the kindness of her parent, the countess endeavoured to banish from her mind the severe disappointment her Edmund would receive, and entered into discourse with her father. Once or twice she inquired how far they were going? and noticed that they were in the same road which they had travelled when they quitted the Wilderness. Lord Mortimer smiled, and changed the subject.

At

At length, however, they came within sight of the villa of the marchioness. The carriage stopped, and the countess, although greatly fatigued, felt a secret pleasure at once more entering a house sacredly dear to her, as being the scene of her first introduction to Dudley, and the silent witness of their mutual tendernesses. She anxiously followed her father into the drawing-room, but no friend greeted their arrival.

Lord Mortimer took her hand, and led her to a seat—" Ask no questions, my Althea; you want rest and refreshment; to-morrow I will explain the cause of your being brought here."

" And is this the end of our journey, my dear father? and have you no friend to visit?" inquired the trembling countess.

" You forget what I have just told you, Althea; go, my love, and prepare for dinner. There was a time when the society of your father constituted your chief

chief happiness—endeavour to let it do so now."

The countess was no sooner alone with her nurse, than she flung her arms round her neck, and sobbing with violence, exclaimed that she was betrayed—that she was certain her father could have no other motive in bringing her there but to separate her from Dudley.

Mrs. Mason tried to comfort her by every art in her power; and advised her to change her dress, and attend the earl in the dining-parlour. Unwillingly the countess yielded to the prudent advice of Mrs. Mason; and with every indication of sorrow and indisposition, reluctantly took her seat at table.

Their repast was almost a silent one. With difficulty the lovely wife of Dudley forced herself to swallow a part of the delicacies which the earl selected for her. Seeing that the efforts which she made to oblige him were painful to herself, his lordship ceased to importune her;

and

and feeling that notwithstanding her manifest distress was occasioned by her absence from her lover, yet she was nevertheless an object of his tenderest concern, he advised her to retire to her own room; hoping, he said, to see her at breakfast the next day, perfectly recovered from every disagreeable effect of her journey.

Gladly did the countess obey the kind desire of her father, and hastened to give way to her tears, which she had with difficulty repressed in his presence. The sweet serenity of the evening tempted her to walk round the grounds, and to visit those parts rendered dear by the recollection of her Edmund—"Here," said the countess, as she seated herself on the bench which Dudley had occupied on the day that he disclosed to her his passion, "it was on this seat my Edmund first ventured to pronounce those blissful words which made me the happiest of women! Alas! what am I now? carried off

off clandestinely from the husband of my choice, and at a moment when we were fondly planning schemes of felicity too perfect to be realized! No longer can I boast myself the happiest of women: deprived of his society, which constituted my world, and doomed to encounter the just resentment of an indulgent father, alas! I am now the most unfortunate! And thou, too, my Edmund, art become a partaker of my sorrow. At this moment thou art lamenting the absence of thy Althea."

The miniature of her husband was drawn from its snowy recess, and pressed passionately to her lips. As she gazed on the regularly-handsome features of Dudley, the countess almost imagined that she beheld in the bright blue eyes an expression of tender reproach—"Ah!" said she, replacing it in her bosom, "such would be the look of my Edmund, could I but see him at this instant. Yes, dearest, I have been to blame; I have allowed

the

the affection of a daughter to interfere with the duties of a wife; and in delaying my removal thus late, suffer most cruelly for my obstinacy."

Recollecting that she had at least the power of transmitting her ideas to this idolized being, she returned to her chamber, and ringing for Mrs. Mason, inquired for her writing-desk.

"Is your ladyship going to write to Mr. Dudley?" said her faithful nurse.

The countess answered in the affirmative.

"I am sorry to be the messenger of bad news," continued Mrs. Mason, "but my lord has given strict orders that every letter which comes or goes should be brought to him."

This was indeed striking at the root of the countess's last hope, whose tears now streamed afresh, as she leaned on the shoulder of her sympathizing confidant, and besought her assistance to con-

vey to Dudley the intelligence of where he might find her.

"My dearest lady," said the affectionate nurse, "all power to assist you is taken from me. The earl seems well assured of your secret attachment, for he has left nothing undone to prevent the slightest possibility of any intercourse with Mr. Dudley. As soon as you had left the dining-parlour, Harris was summoned to attend the earl; and, upon his return to the housekeeper's room, he said to me in confidence—'That he had never expected to be placed as a spy over the actions of his dear young lady; and that he wished, to the bottom of his soul, people would mind their own business, instead of that of others.'

"I asked him what he meant?—'Some good-natured friend has put it into my lord's head,' said he, 'that the countess and young Mr. Dudley are in love with each other, which, I dare say, never en-

tered

tered their minds; and my master, as is very natural, is terribly vexed at the idea of the countess letting herself down so much. Poor dear young creature,' continued Harris, 'I wonder who could be so wicked as to raise such a report. I dare say we shall soon be packed off to the old Castle again, for my lord does not seem to think this far enough from London."

"Gracious Heaven!" exclaimed the countess, "what will become of me? I will write to my dear father, Mason; I will confess my marriage, and throw myself at once upon his affection and mercy."

"I think it is the only thing now left your ladyship to do. It will be impossible for you to conceal it much longer, and it will be better to discover it at once, both for your own sake and Mr. Dudley's."

"Oh, my beloved husband!" said the lovely countess, "that it were possible

for me to have you now with me! Could I but repose this aching head upon thy dear bosom—could I but hear the endearing tones of thy tender voice, how light would be my griefs—how trifling my pains! Stay with me, Mason; I will this instant write to the earl. That weighty task performed, I will retire to rest, and trust in the divine mercy of the Supreme Being to soften the heart of my father towards his disobedient child."

The letter of the countess drew tears from her affectionate nurse. It was couched in the most submissive terms; yet while she sought not to vindicate her fault, she humbly trusted that the superior abilities and exalted mind of Dudley would not only plead for her with her father, but make amends for the inferiority of his birth and fortune. She concluded by beseeching him to pardon this sole act of her disobedience, to compassionate her situation, and to restore her to the society of him for whom alone

she

she wished to live, and without whom all the advantages she might possess of rank and splendour would be of no avail—"Let this be given to the earl in the morning," said the countess, "with a request that I may be permitted to breakfast in my own room."

Mrs. Mason, with trembling apprehension as to the effect the letter might have on lord Mortimer, hastened back to the chamber of her mistress as soon as she had delivered it. His lordship, confident of ill, slowly opened the envelope which contained the fatal secret that blasted all his hopes, and disappointed him of his long-treasured and dearest wishes.

He read and re-read the letter of the countess, as if unwilling to put confidence in his own senses; till at length convinced that it was no illusion, but that he had sustained an injury which no time could efface, no penitence do away, he retired to the library, where, after locking the door, he sat down to determine

upon the line of conduct which it was becoming his dignity and the honour of his family to adopt.

Stung to the soul by the ingratitude of his only child, who had thus daringly disposed of herself without even paying him the compliment to ask his consent, and indignant at the bold presumption and perfidy of Dudley, as he deemed them, the earl resolved upon immediately removing the countess to Mortimer Castle, and, as she was considerably under age, confining her there, until her hasty and imprudent marriage could be set aside. Once resolved, he was inflexible. His very tenderness so ill-requited made his resentment the keener; and all that excess of paternal fondness which he had ever felt for his Althea, was now swallowed up by the bitterness of the insult which he had received.

Harris was rung for, and ordered to send Mrs. Mason to his lordship, who said, on seeing her pale and terrified—

"Do

"Do not be alarmed, Mason; I merely sent for you that you might be the bearer of a message from me to the countess of Brandon, for I shall not condescend to write to her. Tell her, since she has forgotten what is due to herself and me, I shall take the most effectual steps to convince her that the authority of a parent, which she has set at defiance, is not to be disregarded with impunity. As she has forfeited every claim to the affection of a father, bid her prepare to meet all the rigour of a guardian; and it is my positive commands that she does not attempt to obtrude herself on my presence, as I will not answer for what might happen from the effects of my extreme resentment. To-morrow I shall remove her to the Castle, where she shall remain a prisoner, until the audacity of *him* she has been pleased to make her temporary husband has received its just punishment."

Mrs. Mason flung herself on her knees

before the earl—"Oh, my lord, may I venture to plead for my unfortunate lady—for the innocent child, which must then become illegitimate!"

"Hold!" cried the earl; "it is your province to obey, and not to presume upon my forbearance. I shall not reproach you, nurse, for keeping too faithfully the secret of your mistress; I know your mild and affectionate nature would not be able to resist the entreaties of the child, who must be as dear to you as your own; but I must take care not to place it in her power to seduce you again from your duty to your master. If you are willing to be included in the countess's banishment, you must agree to be considered as a prisoner with herself, and to suffer with her all the hardships which I may think fit to inflict; but remember, that the least disposition on your part to infringe on my orders, or to step beyond the limits which I shall allow you, will be followed by your eternal dismissal

from

from the countess's person, and my favour and protection."

Mrs. Mason could only curtsey; her tears and sobs took from her all power of utterance. Slowly she returned to the countess, who met her at the head of the stairs, and who read her sentence in the deep affliction of her faithful confidant. With great delicacy and tenderness Mrs. Mason tried to soften down the message of lord Mortimer; but with all her prudence she could not, for she dared not conceal his intentions. Her maternal arms enfolded the lifeless form of the beautiful disobedient; her bosom, which had nourished her when a smiling infant, now supported her drooping head; and her tears and lamentations alone recalled the idol of her soul to life, and to a sense of her own wretchedness.

"Oh, my beloved, my adored lady!" said the nurse of Althea, "give not yourself thus up to despair. My lord feels angry at your seeming to think light of

his displeasure—at your seeming to forget all his uniform kindness; he will not see you or speak to you for the present; but when his resentment subsides, he will remember only your virtues, he will forgive, and restore you to his favour."

"But am I not torn from my Edmund!" replied the agonized countess; "and shall I not be removed to-morrow to the Castle, where, even should he find out my abode, it will be impossible for him to have access to me!—Oh, my beloved husband! for whose sake I have dared the heavy resentment of a dear father—for whose sake I would endure a thousand ills, what will become of *thee*, separated from thy Althea?—and thou, oh sacred pledge of our mutual fondness! what will become of *thee* also?"

Again the countess relapsed into a state of insensibility, from which she was with great difficulty recovered. Mrs. Mason conjured her to moderate her distress—to consider that the life of her

child

child might be sacrificed by giving way to an excess of sorrow; and that it was a duty she owed her husband to bear with fortitude her present affliction, and to take care of a life more dear to him than his own.

Notwithstanding the kind endeavours of Mrs. Mason, the countess continued more dead than alive. She trembled at the idea of the misfortunes which might fall on her Edmund, and of the sufferings which herself would endure, at the trying hour of her approaching confinement, far from the consoling voice and reviving presence of her husband.

Scarce able to stand, she, the next morning, with the assistance of Mrs. Mason, descended from her room, on being told the carriage waited which was to convey her still further from her adored Dudley. Casting an anxious look around, she remembered how differently she had felt when last she quitted the Wilderness —now, how sad the reverse! no tender

Edmund

Edmund to assist her to her carriage—no kind father to animate her by his approving smiles, or lighten the fatigues of travelling by his edifying and instructive conversation. Her presence had become disagreeable to him; for he would not even take a seat in the same carriage with her, but had ordered for himself a hired chaise, in which he meant to follow the lovely criminal.

Mortified and sick at heart, the unhappy wife of Dudley, accompanied by her sympathising nurse, set out for Mortimer Castle; while the earl, burning with indignation and shame to be so deceived, finished his letters to his sister and the duchess of Fitz-Aubin; and then, directing them to be forwarded immediately, followed the carriage of his imprudent daughter.

CHAP.

CHAP. VIII.

While the countess was rapidly proceeding to the magnificent abode of her infancy, now destined to become her prison, Dudley was confined to his bed by a violent fever, brought on by the shock his mind received upon being informed of her departure.

Full of the most sanguine expectations of soon possessing entirely the society of his lovely wife, Dudley, according to his promise, hastened to the house of the marchioness, eager to describe to his Althea the retreat which he had fixed upon to receive her. Lady Wilmington was denied to him; but he was permitted to see the tutor of her children. His feet hardly touched the stairs which led to the chamber of Leopold—his first inquiry was for a letter from the countess.

Courteney, with a longer face than usual, and an air of solemnity which indicated that he had much to communicate, replied, that her journey was so sudden, that he supposed she had no time to write.

"What!" hastily exclaimed her husband, "my Althea quit town without leaving me an explanation of the cause of her mysterious journey! Come, come, Leopold, do not torture me any longer, but give it me."

"I feel for you, my dear Edmund, too acutely to trifle with your feelings at a moment like this. Oh! would to God that I could present you with what you so naturally desire!—Cruel Althea! not to soften, as much as possible, the blow which was to fall on my beloved friend."

"Ha!" cried Dudley, with a shudder of agony, "I comprehend! the earl has discovered our marriage, and has carried off my wife! say, Leopold, is it not so?"

"I am sorry, dearest Edmund," replied

plied the artful hypocrite, "to corroborate your fears. Lord Mortimer, exasperated beyond measure, appealed to me, as your supposed confidant, for information concerning the truth of what he had heard. I pleaded ignorance of your attachment, and even ventured to doubt the credibility of his informer. But this was of no avail; he denounced vengeance on your head, and swore that from that hour you should never more behold the countess!"

"Inhuman!" exclaimed Dudley. "Yet perhaps he is still ignorant of the indissoluble bonds which unite me to his daughter, and of the delicacy of her situation."

"Alas! my beloved Edmund," replied the sanctified dissembler, "you will find, I fear, that those tender bonds are not indissoluble. You forget that the countess is under age, and that her father has the power to set aside your marriage. Oh, my dear, dear friend! it was *this* that

made

made me receive so ungraciously the news of your seeming good fortune—it was *this* that made me tremble for the happiness of my generous Dudley."

Courteney might have gone on for an hour longer—his friend heard him not. Fixed, immoveable, he sat like the statue of despair. Courteney took his hand, and pressed it to his lips—"Oh that I should live to see you thus!" said he, dropping a tear on the burning hand of his friend; "speak to me, Edmund; it is I—your friend—your Leopold!"

Dudley, turning his head, gazed on him; then broke out into an hysteric laugh. Courteney, who wanted to get rid of the man he had so basely betrayed, unbuttoned his waistcoat, and presented to his view the picture of the countess. Like magic it operated on the distracted brain of her husband. Pressing it passionately to his lips, he burst into an agony of tears, which gave him considerable relief, while it recalled him to a

sense

sense of the severe loss which he had sustained.

"Bear with my weakness," said the unsuspecting Dudley; "it is for my Althea, my adored Althea, that I suffer. Sweet angel! how will she support the anger of the earl! how support her absence from me, in her present situation! But I will follow her, if it is to the extremity of the world. I will shew lord Mortimer that the rights of a husband are stronger than those of a father. Have you no idea, Leopold, of the place to which he has carried her?"

"None," replied Courteney. "Their departure was so hasty, that it cannot have transpired."

"And my Althea did not even leave a message for me?"

"Not a word, I assure you, although I purposely gave her an opportunity; nor should I have supposed, by the serenity of her countenance, that she had

been

been on the eve of quitting her husband, perhaps for ever."

"Distraction! and could the heart of Althea feel composed, could she appear cheerful, when going to be separated from *me—me*, who live but in *her* presence, and whose whole soul at that moment was absorbed in tenderness for her? Oh, misery! misery! perhaps her tardiness to yield to my earnest wishes for her removal proceeded from an abatement of her love; and Althea's self may even assist to disannul her plighted faith, and cast upon her infant the stigma of illegitimacy."

"Dear Edmund, compose yourself. Take my advice; seek not to discover the retreat of the countess; she is yet but a child; the attentions and splendid rank of the duke of Fitz-Aubin may have dazzled her senses, and estranged her affections; wait patiently the result of her removal; do not too daringly expose

yourself

yourself to the anger of her father, whose resentment may abate, by your seeming to pay him a proper submission and respect."

"And who is lord Mortimer," angrily demanded the husband of Althea, "that I should cringe and fawn to him with submission and respect? I am not afraid of him personally, and only dread the effect his anger may have on his daughter. True, his lordship is a peer of the realm, and *I* cannot even claim relationship with the peasant, for I know not to whom I belong, or to whom I am related; yet I feel that I am a man, and lord Mortimer's *equal,* except in title—*that* any courtly sycophant and slave may purchase; but not the proud consciousness of a soul and mind which ennobles itself. My beloved Althea rose superior to such petty distinctions; she loved me for myself—she blessed me with her hand—and never while I exist will I shrink, like

a coward,

a coward, from the face of danger or death to assert my claim. No, Leopold, in the impulse of the moment, while smarting from disappointed love, I injured the countess by supposing her affections capable of changing. Not follow her! not endeavour to trace out her abode, and rescue her from solitary sorrow! oh! you counsel like one who has never felt what it is to be a husband, or to anticipate the rapture of becoming a father!"

"Pardon me," said the treacherous preceptor; "my counsels sprung not from my own feelings, but from my friendship for yourself. Lord Mortimer appeared so highly incensed against you, that I judged it unsafe for you to throw yourself in his way."

"Thank you, my worthy friend," replied Dudley; "let me see you, or hear from you, for I shall not call again, in compassion to lady Wilmington, who would

would feel hurt to be obliged to shut her doors against one whom she has honoured with her regard."

Courteney promised to call, if possible, on him the next evening; and with every appearance of well-dissembled sorrow, saw the generous Edmund quit, perhaps for ever, a house which had been open to him at all times, and the doors of which might never have been closed upon him, but for *his* treachery and baseness. Exulting in the success of his plot, and fervently hoping that he might not be able to find out the residence of the countess, Courteney prepared to attend the summons, and answer the questions, of lady Wilmington, fully resolved to heighten, as much as possible, whatever might appear like insolence or ingratitude in Dudley, and to alarm her ladyship by his positive determination of finding her niece, wherever she might be concealed.

Dudley, meanwhile, returned home in

a state

a state of mind truly distressing. Although bent upon following his Althea, yet he knew not to whom he should apply, for who indeed was likely to be apprized of the place of her concealment, except lady Wilmington? Disappointed in not receiving a line from the countess, and alarmed lest her health should suffer by her hasty removal, and the displeasure of the earl, Dudley became seriously indisposed. A burning fever raged through his veins, and he was unwillingly obliged to send for his worthy friend doctor Bennet, who no sooner saw the flush on his countenance, and felt the rapid beat of his pulse, than he ordered him to his bed-room; and, with truly paternal kindness, conjured him to refrain from dwelling on any subject that would increase his irritation.

Dudley not only respected, but loved his venerable physician; his mind and soul was full of his Althea, and of their separation; tears gushed from his eyes,

as

as he reflected on his present inability to travel, and anxious that the cause of his seeming weakness should be explained to doctor Bennet, he confided to him his marriage, and the severe misfortune which he had just sustained.

Delighted by this proof of his young friend's affection, the amiable physician gave him every encouragement not to despair, and afforded him the highest consolation by his friendly and judicious advice. What gave most comfort to his patient was, the hope which he held out to him of hearing from the countess herself.

"Wait patiently, my dear boy," said the kind doctor Bennet; "doubtless your sweet wife will seize the first opportunity of letting you know the place of her residence; but she may not be able to do so immediately. Your present affliction appears a heavy one; yet, my dear Dudley, reflect that it is not incurable or hopeless. You have not to

lament either the *death* or the *infidelity* of her you love. Let this thought assist to lighten the sorrow which now oppresses you. *You* only suffer from the temporary absence of a beloved object, while *I* have been fated to endure trials more severe."

Dudley raised his languid head; and doctor Bennet read, in the speaking language of his fine features, all the solicitude of filial affection—" Be obedient to my orders," continued his new friend; " and as soon as you are well enough, your confidence shall be repaid by mine."

Soon, however, were the words of the doctor forgotten, and even the consciousness of his own misery. The fever increased, and he became delirious. During the height of his disorder his steady friend never quitted him, except to attend the duties of his profession. Even at night he reposed on a couch by the side of his insensible favourite.

At

At length the violence of the fever abated, and Dudley, weak and exhausted, called, in a faint voice, for drink. Immediately his watchful friend quitted his couch, and was by the side of his patient, administering to his wants. Surprised at the presence of doctor Bennet at that late hour, he endeavoured to converse; but this was denied him. Seeing the doctor return to his sofa, Dudley instantly comprehended the reason of his being there; and though forbid to express by words his gratitude, yet his tears would not be restrained.

In the morning doctor Bennet thought it safe to tell him the danger he had past, and his own paternal care of him—" All I require of you, my dear Dudley, is, to be as tranquil as possible, and to follow implicitly my rules. I will not leave you until I can do so with safety to yourself."

Such unlooked-for goodness, such disinterested attachment, overpowered the

grateful heart of the invalid. All that he could do was to be obedient to the inestimable man who thus voluntarily performed the tender offices of a father.

A fortnight elapsed before he was suffered to converse on the subject dearest to his soul. Again the doctor represented the improbability of the countess being allowed the opportunity of writing, yet held out to him the hope that the fertile imagination and well-known ingenuity of a woman would shortly procure the accomplishment of his wishes. Lured by this sweet hope, Dudley, in gratitude to his kind adviser, took the only method in his power to evince it, by a ready compliance with all his proposals.

At the end of three weeks, Dudley was able to take an airing in the doctor's chariot. He had written several times to Courteney, expressing a desire to see him; and had mentioned his dangerous illness, and the fatherly affection of doctor Bennet. Leopold would fain have

excused himself from visiting the man whose peace he had so materially injured; but not willing to give cause for suspicion, he called on him one evening, and found the physician occupied in reading for the amusement of his patient.

Dudley presented to his false friend the worthy doctor, and styled him the preserver of his life, his adopted father. Courteney seized the hand of doctor Bennet, and pressed it to his lips, with every indication of rapturous gratitude, hailing him as the saviour of one dearer to him than his own existence.

"Oh, my friend!" said he, "how thankful am I to God, who, in the midst of your sufferings, raised you up such a consoler as doctor Bennet!—I am a stranger to you, sir; but in the service you have rendered Edmund, you have conferred on me in particular a lasting obligation."

The doctor bowed—"I have done no more," he replied, "than what is the

There was a something in his address to myself, which struck me as overstrained, as forced. I watched his countenance when speaking on the subject on which the peace and happiness of his friend depended, and I imagined that when he caught my eye, there was an embarrassment which ill accorded with the sincerity of his professions. In short, he is a man before whom I should speak and act with great reserve."

"Oh, my dear doctor! you wrong poor Courteney, I assure you. I grant that his demure appearance and stiffness of manners are not calculated, at the first interview, to create him friends; but I firmly believe that a worthier creature does not exist. He has long struggled with poverty and misfortunes, but not singly, for his wife and her sister, both amiable women, have unfortunately suffered with him. It happened most providentially for me, as well as his family, that lady Wilmington applied to me to

recommend

recommend her a tutor to her children. I introduced Courteney, and gained for him a situation which, I trust, will effectually remove those difficulties he has long laboured under. Were he my brother, I could not feel more deeply interested in his welfare."

"That I believe," rejoined the friendly physician, "and only hope that Mr. Courteney may prove, by his actions, deserving of the character which you give him. The generous confidence of youth I would not wholly repress; it springs from noble feelings, and an honest heart, which, conscious of its *own* integrity, fearlessly relies upon *that* of others. Yet, Edmund, the more you know of mankind, the more bitterly will you find cause to regret its treachery and ingratitude; and instances will not be wanting to convince you, that interest or love will even corrupt the tenderness of a father, and turn brotherly affection into deadly animosity. I once

hinted to you that I had bought my experience dearly, and I know of no better opportunity than the present to exemplify it, if you do not already feel weary of an old man's moralizing."

Dudley assured him that such would never be his case. Delicacy alone had prevented his making a request which might be deemed impertinent or curious, but which he had, nevertheless, long wished to make. The tea-things being removed, doctor Bennet began.

"It is almost unnecessary for me to premise, that I am the second son of sir George Bennet, who, unfortunately for me, did not succeed to the title until I was in my twentieth year. I say unfortunately, because that event too fatally decided the happiness of my future life.

"My father was early left a widower, with a large family to bring up genteelly out of a very limited income; he therefore thought it best to reside wholly on an estate which belonged to him in

Hampshire,

Hampshire, and which, of itself, produced the chief articles for our support. After the death of my mother, a lady came to preside over the domestic concerns of my father, and to superintend the education of my sisters. Her steady attachment to us all, and the uniform maternal tenderness with which she regarded her young charge, soon gained our affection, which increased as we arrived at years of maturity. It was our general wish that my father would give her a legitimate right to the tender name by which his children had always called her, and I believe she herself encouraged the same hope.

"My father, whose classical knowledge and literary acquirements rendered him fully competent for the undertaking, instructed myself and brothers in every necessary branch of education, until we were old enough to be sent to college. He then entrusted us to the care of a distant relation of our maternal friend, who

went with us to Oxford. I chose my own profession, and my studies were regulated accordingly. The vacations were joyfully spent at home, amidst the highly-cultivated society of my sisters, and that of a neighbouring family, who had lately come to reside about a mile distant from my father's house. This was a most desirable acquisition to our little party, which was enlarged by the frequent visits of two lovely girls, and their brother, a most excellent young man, and our fellow-collegian.

"The Miss Edens had passed their winter in London, and had received finishing lessons from the best masters of that time. With extreme good-nature, they volunteered to go over the same with my sisters, who thankfully accepted their offer. This necessarily occasioned a stricter intimacy between the two families; and my father never seemed better pleased than when Mr. and Mrs. Eden and their children were present.

"As

" As the time approached for our return to Oxford, I felt my reluctance increase to quit home, now rendered doubly dear by the frequent opportunities I enjoyed of conversing with the youngest Miss Eden. My brother also evinced equal pleasure in the society of her sister, and scrupled not to avow openly his sentiments; but *he* was the darling of my father, who was next heir to the baronetage, and ten thousand a-year—*I* could not boast of any expectations but what might arise from my profession, and three hundred a-year left me by my maternal grandfather. Notwithstanding this drawback to my hopes, I found that it had no power over my affections; my heart continued to beat with the same fondness for the lovely Amelia as if I had been licensed to adore her; and my vanity induced me to imagine, that had such been the case, the sweet girl would not have disdained my pretensions.

" On our return to college, the loss of my

my usual spirits was quickly noticed by young Eden. He inquired the cause with friendly anxiety, and cautioned me against being fascinated by the beauty of his sisters, as his father's determination of marrying them to men of title and fortune was well known—'George,' said he, laughingly, 'stands a tolerable chance, as being heir to both; but if you value your peace, my dear Bennet, you will keep clear of temptation, and regard the handsome persons of my sisters with the same sort of feeling as I do a fine picture, whose price is above the compass of my pocket.'

"I thanked him for his advice, which I said was unnecessary; yet I forbore to tell him the reason why my brother alone was my confidant; and he, from affection and good-nature, encouraged me to hope.

"Oh, how heavily passed the time until the next vacation! how transporting were my feelings on alighting at my father's door, on pressing to my lips the

soft

soft hand of Amelia, who, with the rest of her family, were there to welcome our return! I thought I perceived, in the deep colour of her cheek, and the brilliancy of her eyes, an emotion that sprung from something dearer than that of friendship, and I allowed myself to be led away by this dangerous delusion.

" We were now more intimate than ever. Our mornings were generally spent in riding or walking, and our evenings in a family concert, which, as we were all performers, was by no means insignificant. The sweet voice of Amelia, accompanying her harp, enchanted my father as well as myself; and it was easy to observe that my gentle favourite was his also.

" My brother was now the acknowledged lover of Miss Eden; even her mother, a proud, haughty, and self-directed woman, made no objection to the match, and her consent was all that was requisite upon any affair of consequence.

It

It was therefore agreed, that he should remain at home, and enjoy the society of his future wife. My father likewise deemed it necessary for me to remove to London, to the house of my uncle, an eminent physician, who wished to retire from the fatigues of his profession, as soon as I was capable of acting in his stead.

"Obliged to yield to the necessity of my circumstances, I yet determined to know the real state of Amelia's sentiments before I quitted her a second time, as I should not again visit the home of my infancy until called upon to attend the nuptials of my brother.

"One day, after my father and old Mr. Eden had been talking over family matters, and from thence to the intended marriage of my brother, he turned round hastily, and said to me—'Who knows, Frank, but that when you succeed to the old gentleman's profession, he may throw his daughter into the bargain. I hear she

she is a very fine girl, and I know that she will have plenty of the requisite.'

"I looked at Amelia, whose colour faded at this speech of my father's, and who soon after asked my favourite sister to take a walk in the garden. I followed, and surprised her in tears. Hastily attributing them to sudden indisposition, she accepted of my proffered arm, and began to talk with a vivacity which seemed forced, and but ill agreed with the plea of illness. Anxious to discover if the idea of my absence had affected her, I purposely brought up the subject of my departure; and lamented most severely that the duties of my profession would, in a manner, banish me from my family and native place. My sister wept at the suggestion; for we had always felt for each other the fondest affection, and, next to quitting Amelia Eden, the deprivation of her society deeply affected me.

"Turning towards the beloved object of my soul, I ventured to express a hope that

that she would not entirely forget the brother of her friend. Her reply, and the blushing confusion of her face, gave me fresh hopes. I again beheld the starting tears; and, scarce able to check my own, I acknowledged my long-cherished passion, and lamented that my want of fortune had compelled me to remain silent upon a subject on which depended my only earthly hope of happiness.

"Amelia hid her agitation in the bosom of my sister, who affectionately embracing her, said—'It is, at least, in your power, my dear girl, to ease my brother from the tortures of suspense. Let not a false notion of delicacy, my Amelia, prevent you from acting with your native candour.'

"Judging by this that my sister was in the confidence of Amelia, I flung myself on my knees before her, and pressing her hand tenderly to my lips, besought her at once to pronounce my doom. Never, Dudley, shall I forget the

the raptures of that moment! I feel my heart beat quicker at the remembrance, although nearly forty years have elapsed since that period. With the sweetest confusion, which served to heighten her natural charms, Amelia entreated me to rise, and owned that the brother of her Sophia had never been indifferent to her; that from the first period of our becoming intimate, she had been aware that her heart would never feel the same emotions on the sight or the touch of another. My transports were now unbounded; I clasped her to my bosom, and on pressing my lips to hers, felt a bliss till then unknown.

"Recovering from my delirium of joy, my Amelia said, that she feared it would be impossible to gain the consent of her mother, who had expressly educated her sister and herself with the view of marrying them to men of rank and fortune; and that it was some time before her father could bring her to yield

to

to her sister's becoming the wife of George.

'Let us hope, my Amelia,' I cried, 'that your mother will be equally generous to us; since the profession of my uncle is of considerable value, and will, in a short time, enable me to ask for your hand with confidence. Until then, my beloved girl, let us draw consolation from the hope that, as George means to carry his bride to London, you may be suffered to accompany her. Our opportunities of seeing each other will then be unlimited. But why, my dearest Amelia, will you not put it out of the power of ambition to mar our loves? let us be united at the parish church of the next town; and then we may laugh at the vain endeavours of your mother to make my Amelia a *lady* against her will.'

'Oh, not for the world,' said she, shrinking timidly from my arms, 'would I marry against the knowledge of my mother! Such a step, taken without her consent

consent or advice, would embitter all my future years. No, my dear Bennet, to become your wife would be the height of my desires, but my parents' blessing must sanctify the deed.'

"Trusting to the great kindness Mrs. Eden had always manifested towards me, and likewise to the favourable appearance of my own prospects, I forbore to press my Amelia on a subject which she seemed to regard with fixed aversion. We however settled, that through the means of George, our letters could be transmitted to each other, and we should consequently enjoy all that absence would permit. Sophia now reminded us that it would be proper to return to the house, which we accordingly did.

"On our joining the family, I thought my father looked unusually serious, and even displeased, on hearing that I had accompanied my sister and her friend in their stroll round the grounds. Amelia was desired by her mother to play and sing

sing a duet, in which I had hitherto sung second. My father, however, now chose to take my place; and rising with quickness, led her to the instrument. His voice was strong and musical, and improved by science. To the plaintive tenderness of the air and words he did ample justice. Mrs. Eden was delighted, and complimented highly my father's performance. Amelia rose to give her seat to Sophia; but my father entreated her to continue, and for the remainder of the evening, kept close to her side, securing to himself the whole of her conversation.

"Scarce knowing why, I yet felt particularly uncomfortable at this behaviour of my father. I saw it gave Amelia pain; while her mother only laughed, talked louder than usual, and repeatedly complimented my father on his good looks. To do justice to the author of my being, I must allow that few men of five-and-forty could boast of a more prepossessing countenance,

countenance, manly and elegant figure, and manners peculiarly attractive. He was, in short, a man that any woman, whose affections were disengaged, might love; and I began to tremble for myself when I reflected on his extensive powers of fascinating, which he now seemed determined to display and to exert.

"The next morning I called on the Edens, and learnt from Amelia that her mother had questioned her very narrowly respecting the state of her feelings towards me, and cautioned her against giving the least encouragement to my addresses, as it would only bring ruin on my head, and place herself in a very *delicate* situation; she however refused to explain her allusion—'I shall be glad,' said she, 'when Frank goes to London; for he is a fine young man, and if not a fool, will take care to turn to advantage the handsome person that nature has given him.'

"At

"At my age, my dear Dudley, I may be allowed to repeat the praise of Mrs. Eden, without running any risk of incurring the imputation of vanity."

Dudley grasped his hand affectionately, and the doctor continued.

"On my return home, my father inquired when I intended to begin my journey?—'I think,' said he, 'you have already exceeded the time your uncle mentioned in his letter. I wish you to study his comfort and ease as much as possible; and therefore advise you to set off to-morrow. I also wish you to remember, Frank, your own interest. It is not in my power to do any thing for you, beyond allowing you what is necessary, until your profession shall render my assistance needless. You will have many opportunities of increasing your fortune by marriage; and I trust that you will determine on the most eligible. I know of no young woman that I should better

better like for my daughter than your cousin; and I seriously advise you to endeavour to gain her for a wife.'

"I thanked my father for his counsel, but expressed great reluctance to leave home so suddenly.—'You cannot go too soon,' he replied, 'if you wish to oblige your uncle; and I do not see why you should feel such *poignant* regret at leaving your family *now*, especially as you will most likely return to celebrate the nuptials of your brother. I am afraid, Frank, that you have a stronger motive for wishing to prolong your stay. I have observed you too particular of late to Amelia Eden; and should you have been weak enough, as well as so imprudent as to think of her, notwithstanding your knowledge of her mother's intentions, which are irrevocable, why, the sooner you remove from the society of one who is destined to become the wife of another, the sooner you will re-

cover your senses, and your proper ideas of filial duty. It is therefore my pleasure, that you give your servant orders to get ready for your removal to-morrow.'

"My father then quitted me; and the only consolation I had left me was, that I should see Amelia in the evening. See her I did; but my father and Mrs. Eden watched us so narrowly, that I could not even whisper to her my tenderest adieus, or receive hers. My brother George promised to afford me all the assistance in his power; and my sister received a hundred little messages to deliver to her lovely friend.

"Heavy was my heart on the morning of my departure. I rose before day-break; and not wishing to disturb any of the family but Sophia, was proceeding softly to her room, when I was surprised by the appearance of the maternal friend I before mentioned. She beckoned me

to

to enter her apartment. Closing the door, she threw her arms round my neck, and wept bitterly.

"Alarmed, I conjured her to be composed, and inquired the cause of her distress—'My beloved Frank,' said she, 'it is for you more than for myself that I grieve. Your happiness and mine are to be sacrificed to this fatal passion of your father's. Alas! my dear boy, he loves Amelia Eden! you are hastily sent off to London, and I shall soon follow you; for never will I, who have been a mother to his children all the best part of my life, submit to be directed and governed by a girl of sixteen.'

"Horror-struck, I remained motionless for a few minutes; then exclaimed, that what she dreaded would never come to pass, for that Amelia's heart was mine, and that she had promised to live only for me. I then repeated our conversation in the garden, and the kind assurances of George, with my hope of Amelia

 being

being allowed to accompany her sister to London. My poor friend was a little soothed by this; and as she again and again embraced me, prayed to God to pour down blessings on my head.

"The bare idea which she had suggested of a rival in my father, affected me deeply; and I arrived at my uncle's in a state of mind truly pitiable. I found him all that can exalt or ennoble human nature. Like a fond father he welcomed my arrival; and placing the hand of his equally amiable daughter in mine, said—'You must henceforward, Frank, act the part of a brother to Indiana. Look on her as a sister; protect her as such; and you will not find her unworthy of your care.'

"But, my dear Dudley, it grows late, and you are not sufficiently recovered from your severe attack to endure any deprivation of your proper repose. To-morrow I will finish my little history, which I see has excited your curiosity."

"I never

"I never obeyed you with more unwillingness," replied his patient, "than I do now. Oh, my dear friend! to whom not only I, but many others, are indebted for their existence, how impatiently shall I wait the conclusion of a narrative which has affected me sensibly."

Doctor Bennet embraced his affectionate favourite; and after taking a slight refreshment, left him for the night, promising to be with him at the dinner-hour the next day.

END OF VOL. I.

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